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This qualitative narrative study presents the Children's Defense Fund Freedom School as an exemplar of an educational program with a model of spiritual education, which supports the preparation of pre-service teachers by nurturing an ethos of service. The purpose of this study is to examine the potential for a summer experience of servant-leadership in a Children's Defense Fund Freedom School to be a catalyst for pre-service teachers becoming servant-leaders who experience, "a long-term, transformational approach to life and work – in essence, a way of being- that has the potential for creating positive change throughout our society" (Spears, 2004, p. 8). I collected and analyzed life-stories of undergraduate students who said they want to become teachers and experienced service-learning through at least one summer of servant-leadership in the context of Children's Defense Fund Freedom Schools.

This qualitative study yielded three themes used to identify an ethos of service, which were used to analyze the collective interpretive voice of the study participants. Findings suggest that pre-service teachers who choose a service-learning experience in a CDF Freedom School have shared pre-dispositions and values. These pre-service teachers interpret the CDF Freedom School program as transformational and more helpful in learning to teach than traditional teacher preparation in the context of the university. In particular, the training component of the program is described as "eye-opening" and needs further scholarly research to further understand its influence.

GUIDE OUR FEET: TEACHER EDUCATION AND SERVANT-  
LEADERSHIP IN A CHILDREN'S DEFENSE FUND  
FREEDOM SCHOOL

by

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## APPROVAL PAGE

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## CHAPTER I

### BACKGROUND AND OVERVIEW OF STUDY

“If you don't like the way the world is, you change it. You have an obligation to change it. You just do it one step at a time.” *Marian Wright Edelman*

#### Purpose and Overview of Study

The purpose of this study is to examine the potential for a summer experience of servant-leadership in a Children's Defense Fund Freedom School to be a catalyst for pre-service teachers becoming servant-leaders who experience, “a long-term, transformational approach to life and work – in essence, a way of being- that has the potential for creating positive change throughout our society” (Spears, 2004, p. 8). I collected and analyzed life-stories of undergraduate students who said they want to become teachers and experienced service-learning through at least one summer of servant-leadership in the context of Children's Defense Fund Freedom Schools. The narratives were prompted by a request to “Tell me the story of your life.” As a result of this study I hoped to better understand how, if at all, it is possible to be intentional in constructing a program of teacher education with an ethos of service, which is transformative for prospective teachers in ways that allow them to, “become prophets who orient the educational process toward a vision of ultimate meaning and infuse education with the sacred” (Purpel, as cited in Slattery, 1995, p.73).



This narrative study is organized to present first a review of related scholarly literature, which provides a theoretical framework for each particular chapter followed by discussion of the findings from the research. The introductory chapter provides an overview of the study; a review of literature related to the purpose and significance of the study and a discussion of my interest in the research questions, which guided this study. Chapter two presents a theoretical framework and practical discussion of the selected methodology and an introduction to the individuals who provided the life-stories that I collected and analyzed. Chapter three begins with a theoretical discussion of a model for spiritually focused education and presents the Children's Defense Fund Freedom School as an exemplar of that model. This chapter also provides an analysis and discussion of the themes that emerged from the interpretations of the CDF Freedom School experience by the study participants. Chapter four provides an overview and an analysis of service-learning through servant-leadership in the CDF Freedom School context, with particular focus on three dispositional themes I developed from my study of critical social theory, service-learning and servant-leadership. These themes reflect an ethos of service shared by the study participants. The final chapter summarizes the conceptual themes, which emerged in this study; as well as the selected methodology and makes suggestions for future research agendas.

A well-known teacher and author posed the question, "Why do we have such a hard time making school a happy place for poor children and children of color?" (Paley, as cited in Delpit, 1996, cover). Olson (2009) expanded the list of those included by Paley as wounded by unhappy school experiences to just about everyone, regardless of

race, culture, socio-economic status or gender. Parker Palmer said that Olson, “raises fundamental questions about the purpose of school in our society, our definitions of intelligence, about the relationships teachers are able to establish and sustain with their students, and asks us to consider the ways in which we might create more cherishing and inclusive school cultures that would incite learning and love” (Palmer, in Olson, 2009, p. xiii). This study is a considered response to those questions.

### Research Interest and Problem Statement

For more than twenty years my days were spent as a public school teacher in an elementary school. Although my school, grade level, and even city changed over the course of those years, my experience was a journey filled with great love and joy. I truly loved my job and the children I taught. Several years ago I made the difficult decision to leave the work I loved in order to become a teacher educator. I believed that this new role would allow me to contribute to the profession more exponentially than spending the remainder of my career as a teacher in one elementary school classroom. I quit my public school job, accepted a job at a nearby college as an elementary educator and enrolled in graduate school.

Teacher education has been for me a culture that is the spiritual and emotional antithesis of my public school classroom community. Initially I theorized that the disconnection between teacher education, public school, and my own teaching experience was directly related to programmatic structure and pedagogical practice combined with what I perceived to be a spirit of hopelessness among my university colleagues. This culture in my experience has grown increasingly focused on externally driven mandates

and requirements to measure the immeasurable and is almost devoid of anything that increases the spiritual connection of the people involved with one another or themselves.

Early in my study of the problem, I was convinced that a curricular and theoretical framework, which embodied the spirit of experiential and invitational education, was essential to needed reformation. I still believe that is probably true, but as a teacher educator and researcher I realized that it was imperative to first explore questions, which could provide an increased understanding of how a school environment could promote and nurture a culture of transformative healing which allows the students and teachers to imagine a different and more spiritual way of being in the world. This study provides a vision of hope for the future, particularly in the education of young people who want to be teachers.

I have seen that beyond methods and theory, a more elusive quality profoundly affects the learning that is possible-the teacher's own integrity, self-awareness, and capacity to be open. In teaching there is a secret hidden in plain sight. The message our students receive from our modeling are even more potent when we invite not only mind and body, but also heart, spirit, and community into our classrooms" (Kessler, R. 2000, p. 162).

During the summer of 2007 I witnessed what appeared to be the transformation of some of my undergraduate students as they spent the summer as servant-leader interns in a Children's Defense Fund Freedom School. Essentially all I knew about CDF Freedom Schools at that point was that college students are employed as the classroom teachers and referred to as servant-leader interns. I had, however, studied the concept of servant-leadership and so I was intrigued with the integration of the concept into a school setting. The structure of the CDF Freedom School experience for college students who want to be

teachers, is on the surface, fairly similar to the traditional route to becoming a teacher, just abbreviated. The first component is a required one-week training program followed by a few workdays and then daily experience in a classroom with children. Teachers in the program, the servant-leader interns, are supported by periodic faculty meetings, which are led by a site director for the purpose of debriefing the experience and providing professional development. There is a reading curriculum and a library of books to be read as part of the curriculum and the teachers are required to use the provided curriculum and write lesson plans.

During my students' experience in this five-week program I had the opportunity to see first-hand that something profoundly different from traditional teacher education happens in a Freedom School. Each morning begins with all of the children and teachers assembled as a community. This gathering begins with the Hallelujah chorus and continues with rousing chants of positive self and community affirmation, dancing, and a visiting reader, which I had the privilege of being on several occasions. During that summer I watched my students experience a transformation in the ways they began to see and describe themselves as teachers and the way they began to relate to their pupils as human beings. Each of my students seemed, "to develop a new awareness of self, a new sense of dignity, and ultimately an experience of hope" (Freire, as cited in Slattery, 1995, p. 199). This study is an attempt on my part to understand if this transformation was unique to my students or perhaps also occurs for others and thus can be used to help me as a teacher educator begin to imagine how the whole process of preparing new teachers can be reconstructed.

The need for teacher education to be transformed is clearly suggested in the scholarly literature, but what is also abundantly clear is that, to date we have yet “to produce a system of teacher education that successfully, and in sufficient numbers, prepares teachers for effective work in diverse school settings” (Murrell, 2001 p. 1 in Jackson, 2006). The sort of healthy relationships required for effective teaching are addressed by Lisa Delpit in *Other People’s Children*, as, “one of the most difficult tasks we face and confounded immeasurably when we attempt to communicate across social lines, racial lines, cultural lines, or lines of unequal power” (Delpit, 1996, p.66). Clearly all of these lines are present in classrooms in the majority of public schools in the United States. CDF Freedom Schools seems to provide hope for preparing teachers who can effectively meet the social, emotional, and academic needs of the students in their classrooms and who are committed to contributing to a transforming vision of a more socially just world.

#### Review of Scholarly Research Related to Teacher Education

Teaching, learning, and learning to teach have provided thoughtful dialogue and monologue throughout history. Aristotle wrote that, “We regard master-craftsmen as superior not merely because they have a grasp of theory and know the reasons for acting as they do. What distinguishes the man who knows from the ignorant man is an ability to teach” (Shulman, 2004, p. 197). Although the debates about which structural and curricular characteristics produce effective teacher preparation programs rage on, several ideas have emerged both in terms what we know and what we need to know more about. According to Zeichner, a characteristic of teacher education reform efforts “is its lack of

historical consciousness” (Zeichner, 1990, p.5). He suggests that, “efforts to reform teacher education have always reflected, often implicitly, varying degrees of commitment and affiliation to several distinct reform traditions” (Zeichner, 1990, p.6).

Zeichner describes these traditions as: the academic tradition, the social efficiency tradition, the developmental tradition, and the social reconstructionist tradition. Cochran-Smith & Fries (in Cochran-Smith and Zeichner eds. 2005) describe four similar reform perspectives they call agendas as: the professionalization agenda, the deregulation agenda, the regulation agenda, and the social justice agenda (p. 43-45). The importance for teacher educators is, “to understand the conceptions of knowledge, teaching, learning, and social welfare associated with particular reform proposals and choose carefully among reform alternatives with a clear sense of their own location in relation to them” (Zeichner, 1990, p. 6).

The AERA Panel on Studying Teacher Education concluded, that “research about teacher education needs now to be undertaken using methods that will increase our knowledge about important features of teacher education and its connections to the outcomes that are important in a democratic society” (Cochran-Smith & Zeichner eds., 2005, p.31). They also suggest that, “there is little research that includes the perspectives, questions, and voices of prospective teachers. Instead the voices and perspectives of university-based researchers predominate” (Cochran-Smith & Zeichner, eds. 2005, p.16).

The need for reform is clear as recent data suggests a thirty-percent high school drop-out rate among all students in the United States and the rate for students of color and

those identified as living in poverty exceeding fifty-percent (Editorial Projects in Education, 2007 as cited in Alliance for Excellent Education, 2007). Studies also suggest that a third of teachers leave the profession during their first three years and almost half leave during the first five years (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2007). Banks, Cochran-Smith, Moll, Richert, Zeichner, LePage, Darling-Hammond, Duffy & McDonald (2005) assert that, “all teachers must be prepared to take into account the different experiences and academic needs of a wide range of students” (as cited in Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005, p. 233). Reform is suggested, if not mandated, in both scholarly literature and public policy, but perhaps a complete transformation is actually what is needed to address what is clearly not working, both in the philosophy and practices of teacher education programs.

In a report entitled “Educating School Teachers” published in 2006 by the Education School Project, Arthur Levine a former president of Columbia Teachers College asserts that accountability is at best problematic and compares teacher training with "Dodge City" describing an "unruly" mix of approaches, without consensus on how long teachers should study, practice, or spend time on teaching theory and mastering content discipline. Levine describes teacher training in this country as chaotic and continuing to prepare teachers without really knowing how to prepare good ones.

Interestingly, serious concerns about the quality and way in which teachers were prepared was once similarly expressed by the first president of the National Commission on Teacher Education and Professional Standards in 1946.

The teacher education system of the United States, with the exception of a very

few states, is a hodgepodge of programs which are in the main a travesty upon professional education. We even provide a better-planned and better-financed system of professional education for those who raise pigs than we do for those who teach children (MacDonald, as cited in Cochran-Smith & Zeichner, eds. 2005, p. 595).

Shulman (2004) asserts that the primary aim of any professional preparation is to, “develop and shape a robust moral vision that will guide practice and provide a prism of justice, responsibility and virtue through which to reflect on their actions” (p. 530). A guiding moral vision or spiritual intelligence is described by Covey (2004) using the metaphor of a compass as, “central and most fundamental of all the intelligences because it becomes the source of guidance of the other three, and represents our drive for meaning” (Covey, 2004, p.53). Reform efforts in teacher education must begin to consider the inclusion of experiences which are transformational in nature and result in teachers capable of being, “truly present in the classroom, deeply engaged with their students and their subjects, and able to weave an intricate web of connections among themselves, their subjects, and their students, so that students can learn to weave a better world for themselves” (Palmer, as cited in Darling-Hammond & Bransford, eds., 2005, p. 13).

CDF Freedom Schools sponsored by the Children’s Defense Fund is one way of providing this sort of transformational experience for students who want to be teachers. The individual and collective interpretations of service-learning through servant-leadership in the context of a CDF Freedom School suggests that this program may produce or at least nurture an ethos of service in pre-service teachers so that they,



“become wiser, freer, more autonomous, healthier, and better able themselves to become servants (Greenleaf, 1977, p.7).

### Freedom Summer

The CDF Freedom School model has its roots in the original Freedom Schools that were part of the 1964 Mississippi Freedom Summer Project. During Freedom Summer eight hundred college students were recruited to spend the summer among other things, providing African-American children and teenagers with richer educational experiences than what was offered in the Mississippi Public Schools. As a result, “both the volunteers and the country were dramatically transformed” (McAdam, 1988, p.5).

This project was designed to assist African-American communities with community planning and voter registration. The goals of the original Freedom Summer project, were to:

1. expand Black voter registration in the state
2. organize a legally constituted "Freedom Democratic Party" that would challenge the whites-only Mississippi Democratic party
3. establish "freedom schools" to teach reading and math to Black children
4. open community centers where indigent Blacks could obtain legal and medical assistance (Cozzens, 1997).

The impact on the college students who participated in the Freedom Summer Project has been documented through narrative accounts written and collected during and after Freedom Summer (Belfrage, 1965; McAdam, 1988; Emery, 2004). McAdam (1988) analyzed survey and interview data, which compared volunteers who participated

in Freedom Summer with those who volunteered to go to Mississippi, yet did not show up for one reason or another. He concluded that, “The two groups may have been similar before the summer, but they emerged from it clearly very different” (McAdam, 1988, p. 10).

McAdam (1988) also concluded that the Freedom Schools that summer, “had an impact beyond the students; the teachers, too, were taught” (p. 86). The Freedom Summer project, which included Freedom Schools as one component, was described by one participant as resulting in, “an explosion of creativity and humanity in all directions toward becoming a more humane society for everyone” (Vivian, as cited in Belfrage, 1965, p. xiv).

#### Children’s Defense Fund Freedom School Program

“The Freedom Schools movement was reborn in 1992 under the leadership of Marian Wright Edelman and the Children's Defense Fund's Black Community Crusade for Children program to advance this transforming vision of education for all children” (Children’s Defense Fund Freedom Schools Program Website). The Children’s Defense Fund uses language consistent with the concepts of servant-leadership and service-learning in referring to both the teachers and the children in the program. Teachers the servant-leader interns and children are the scholars in the program. Both of these terms also reflect the ethos of service I found infused in all parts of this program. This transforming vision for children also appears to include the potential for the teachers to be changed. The transformative potential of the Freedom School experience is important to consider as it could potentially provide a better understanding of how to reform or

transform the way in which all teachers are prepared, as well as provide hope for a more humane and just school experience for all students and teachers.

A review of the historical data available through the Children's Defense Fund website indicates that the contemporary CDF Freedom Schools focus on the benefits for the children in the program and refer to the teachers only as transformative agents.

- All children are capable of learning and achieving at high standards.
- Culture and community conditions influence child learning.
- Appreciation and knowledge of one's culture engenders self worth and the ability to live in community with others.
- Education, teachers, and mentors are transformative agents.
- Literacy is essential to personal empowerment and civic responsibility.
- Effective teaching requires planning, creativity, and implementation, with reflection and processing.
- Learning communities that offer a sense of safety, love, caring, and personal power are needed for transformative education.
- Classroom discipline and management are integral parts of instructional practice.
- Parents are crucial partners in children's learning and need supports to become better parents.
- As citizens, children and adults have the power to make a difference in their communities and be advocates for themselves (Children's Defense Fund Freedom Schools Program Website).

According to the Children's Defense Fund literature, more than 64,000 children and 6,000 college students have been involved in the program since 1995 (CDF Newsletter, Spring 2008).

A three-year study evaluated the impact of CDF Freedom Schools in Kansas City on the scholars (students), servant-leader interns (teachers), parents, and host churches (Philliber Research Associates, 2008). Researchers in this study concluded that:

- Scholars' reading abilities benefit
- Scholars demonstrate positive character development
- Interns are positively influenced in terms of prolonged civic engagement and plans to enter the field of teaching

Only one study found to date focused solely on the influence of the CDF Freedom School experience on college students employed as teachers or servant-leaders in the program (Jackson, 2006). Jackson's study, "examined how program interns learned to teach through their participation in a national training institute and activities and learning opportunities at their local site" (Jackson, 2006, abstract). The methodology in Jackson's qualitative study included observations and field notes, interviews with the site coordinators and national trainers, audio-tapes of staff meetings, and journals written by the interns. Jackson's findings added to an empirical understanding of how a Freedom School experience may help prepare teachers for teaching for social justice and culturally relevant pedagogy.

The gaze of Jackson's study is quite different from this one. The voices of the interns are limited in Jackson's study and interpretive sense is made of their experiences

by the researcher rather than the interns individually or collectively. Jackson suggests the need for studies that explore how the Freedom School experience influences the intern's identity as a teacher. This study responds to that suggestion as well as intentionally situates the interpretive power in the individual and collective voices of the interns. This study is significant to include in a body of educational research in which as stated earlier, "there is little research that includes the perspectives, questions, and voices of prospective teachers. Instead the voices and perspectives of university-based researchers predominate" (Cochran-Smith & Zeichner, eds., 2005, p.16).

One reason for the lack of research, with CDF Freedom School servant-leader interns as the focus, may be the fact that a national or state database of servant-leaders is not available, in fact that data reportedly does not exist (personal communication, A. M., December 6, 2008). The organizational structure of the Freedom School Program relegates the employment of servant-leader interns to the individual sponsoring sites. Although all interns are required to attend a week of national training by the Children's Defense Fund in Tennessee each summer, the data about who these interns are is apparently held at the individual site where they are employed.

#### Scholarly Research Related to Service-Learning

There is research in the area of service-learning which is described as, "intentionally linking service activities with the academic curriculum to address real community needs while students learn through active engagement and reflection (Cairn & Kielsmeier, 1991 as cited in Anderson, Swiff, & Yff, 2001, p. XI). One rationale suggested in the literature for including service-learning in any educational context is that

it may be an effective pedagogy for all teaching and learning. There is evidence that service-learning experiences contribute positively to problem-solving, critical thinking and academic achievement (Eyler & Giles, 1999; Astin & Sax, 1998; Meyers & Pickeral, 1997 as cited in Anderson, Swiff & Yff, 2001).

Service-learning as a way of fostering social understanding, civic engagement, and/or social transformation is defined as, “a vehicle to redistribute power and resources” (Donahue, 1999; Kahne & Westheimer, 1996 as cited in Anderson, Swiff & Yff, 2001, p. 7), and is also supported by research. In a review of the literature on service-learning, Root (1997) suggested that, “social and moral development is enhanced and that personal development in terms of outcomes such as efficacy, self-esteem, confidence in political and social skills, and building relationships with others is increased” (Root, 1997 as cited in Anderson, Swiff & Yff, 2001, p. 8).

Two recommendations for further research in service-learning in teacher education are relevant and support the significance of this study.

- Researchers studying service-learning in teacher education should focus not on adding to a static knowledge base but on strengthening “intelligence”, the ability of individuals to live experimentally and of democratic societies to solve their problems.
- Research on service-learning should support democratic values. That is, studies should contribute knowledge, which can strengthen the democratic characteristics of societies, and should themselves model democratic practices. (Anderson, Swick, & Yff, 2001, p 151).

## Research Related to Service-Learning and Servant-Leadership in Teacher Education

Service-learning and servant-leadership are sometimes used interchangeably but refer to two different, although related, concepts. “Both service learning and servant leadership create experiences through which individuals can discover what leadership means and learn to help others” (Zimmerman-Oster & Burkhardt, 2000, p.17). Servant-leadership, however, involves a different level of personal, perhaps even spiritual, engagement than service or learning, or even the two intentionally integrated and, “is a long-term, transformational approach to life and work – in essence, a way of being- that has the potential for creating positive change throughout our society” (Spears, 2004, p. 8). Although service-learning provides for the intentional inclusion of service through learning experiences in teacher education and the benefits have been documented in the existing literature, there is limited evidence that it serves as a catalyst for the transformational approach to life described by Greenleaf, (1977, p.7).

A review of the literature specifically focused on service learning in teacher education yields support for the belief that it may increase teacher-candidates’ commitment to the field of teaching as well as their ethic of care. The concept of “the ethic of care” was developed by Nell Noddings (1988, 1993 as cited in Anderson, Swick, & Yff, 2001). According to Noddings, “ teachers guided by an ethic of care are concerned not only with their students’ cognitive development but also with their growth as acceptable persons” (as cited in Anderson, Swick, & Yff, 2001, p. 95). Flippo & colleagues (1993); Potthoff & others (2000); and Root and Batchelder (1994) all

concluded that service-learning has a positive influence on the development of an ethic of care in pre-service teacher candidates (as cited in Anderson, Swick & Yff).

Flottemesch, Heide, Pedras, & Goc Karp (in Anderson, Swick & Yff , 2001) included the voices of pre-service students in their study on experiences with service-learning in teacher education. The students in their study interpreted their experiences through journal reflections. These reflections were analyzed for themes that emerged and inter-textual patterns the researchers found within the themes. One student wrote, “I learned from this experience something I have suspected, I love to teach! I love giving the students something new to experience and in turn I love learning from them. It is a wonderful renewal. The whole project had a very uplifting quality” (as cited in Anderson, Swick & Yff, 2001, p. 130).

There is a growing body of literature in servant-leadership, particularly in the field of leadership studies, global leadership, and faith practices. Patterson (2003) developed a model of servant-leadership that includes a sequence beginning with the leader’s agapao love, which leads to humility, altruism, vision, trust, empowerment and concludes with service. Agapao is a Greek verb, while the more familiar form of this word, agape is a noun (Vine’s Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words [http://www.antioch.com.sg/cgi-bin/bible/vines/get\\_defn.pl?num=1710](http://www.antioch.com.sg/cgi-bin/bible/vines/get_defn.pl?num=1710)). Earnhardt (2008) suggested that Patterson’s model and the servant-leadership theory was portable to the context of all five branches of the military and concluded that, “Patterson’s model should be tested in a myriad of organizations and cultures”(Earnhardt, 2008, p.11).



Existing empirical research specific to servant-leadership in teacher education is relatively sparse although two international studies were found (Cerit, 2009; Crippen, 2005). Several teacher-education programs in the United States articulate a conceptual framework of servant-leadership on their websites (Pfeiffer.edu; Whitworth.edu; Seattle Pacific.edu), yet their research base seems to be the concept itself, not as the concept directly causes or is correlated with benefits in teacher education.

### Research Questions

The research questions that guided this study are:

- What are the shared life experiences and dispositional qualities of the individuals who choose to be servant-leader interns in a Freedom School?
- How do pre-service teachers interpret their service-learning experience in a Children's Defense Fund Freedom School as a part of their life stories?
- How do servant-leader interns interpret the Freedom School experience as an influence on learning to teach?
- How are the qualities of servant-leadership reflected in the narratives of students who have been employed as servant-leaders in a Children's Defense Fund Freedom School?
- How might the experience of servant-leadership in the context of a Freedom School potentially contribute to a knowledge base that helps reform or transform teacher education?

## Methodology

This study utilized narrative methodology. Sarason (1993) suggests, “that we cannot judge the measure of a person unless we know who they are” (Bradley, 2000, p.156). The servant-leader interns in this study were asked simply to tell me the story of their lives. This research situated the pre-service teachers’ “own understanding of their experiences at the center of the agenda and supplied different, and perhaps better, knowledge of prevailing conditions”(Casey, 1992, in Goodson, 1992, p.188). As a rationale for this research methodology, Nelson explained that, “to fully understand the meaning, we have to ask and let them speak for themselves” (Nelson, 1983, p.20). I present a more thorough discussion of the methodology in Chapter two.

## Significance

This study adds the individual and collective interpretive voices of pre-service teachers, which are for the most part missing, to the conversation regarding how to improve, through reform or transformation, teacher education programs. It is also significant because of the contribution that the study makes to the scholarly research literature by more clearly connecting service-learning and servant-leadership with the education of pre-service teachers in CDF Freedom Schools.

## Conclusion

This narrative study examines the potential for an intern’s experience in a Children’s Defense Fund Freedom School to serve as a catalyst for a pre-service teacher to truly become a servant-leader with an ethos of service who reflects the qualities identified in Patterson’s 2003 model, and who experiences, “a long-term,

transformational approach to life and work – in essence, a way of being- that has the potential for creating positive change throughout our society” (Spears, 2004, p. 8). The Children’s Defense Fund Freedom School experience contributes to educating pre-service teachers through a training and community building approach in service-learning through servant-leadership, which allows them to, “become prophets who orient the educational process toward a vision of ultimate meaning and infuse education with the sacred” (Purpel, as cited in Slattery, 1995, p.73).

## CHAPTER II

### NARRATIVE RESEARCH

“Learn to be quiet enough to hear the genuine within yourself so that you can hear it in others.” *Marian Wright Edelman*

In the first chapter I provide an overview of the study, a review of literature related to the purpose and significance of the study and a discussion of my interest in the research questions, which guide the study. In this chapter I present the theoretical framework for narrative methodology, a description of the application of that methodology used in this study, and the narratives of the individual study participants.

Narrative research should be, “free-flowing and open-ended, to allow the interviewees to tell their stories in their own words” (Nelson, 1983, p.15). As a rationale for this research methodology, Nelson (1983) stated that, “to fully understand the meaning we have to ask and let them speak for themselves” (Nelson, 1983, p.20). As a narrative researcher, I conducted this study by analyzing what the narrators believed was important to include, worth explaining, or omitted from the story of their lives they chose to tell, rather than requesting information from them in an attempt to support or disclaim my own assumptions. Casey describes this research method as one, which, “places teachers’ own understanding of their experiences at the center of the agenda” (in Goodson, 1992, p.188). Casey suggests that “participants can supply different, and perhaps better, knowledge of prevailing conditions than can the detached observer” (in

Goodson, 1992, p.188). Casey describes the collection of life histories as “not elicited simply for the information which can be extracted; the interpretations which are an integral part of the narratives are considered to be equally, and possibly more valuable components” (in Goodson, 1992, p.188).

Situating the control of the storytelling to the interviewees created an uncomfortable vulnerability for me, since I am typically the teacher who probes, scaffolds, and rephrases in order to facilitate learning in exchanges with students. In this study, my ability to be quiet and trust that my silence allowed me to listen with a different capacity for understanding, as the servant-leaders were empowered to be the authors of their own experience.

The participants in this study are undergraduate students who have been employed as servant-leaders in a Children’s Defense Fund Freedom School and who identify themselves as wanting to become teachers. As a database of potential students is not available or apparently even maintained, participants were initially contacted through a post requesting participation on the Freedom School Facebook group “wall”. This post described the study and provided my contact information. In this post I simply said that I was interested in collecting the life stories of pre-service teacher education candidates who have been or are currently employed as Servant-Leader interns in a Children’s Defense Fund Freedom School for my dissertation research. I described the purpose of my study as trying to understand how Freedom School contributes to the education and preparation of undergraduate students who want to be teachers.

The response to this post was initially overwhelming as students from many parts of the United States contacted me to indicate interest in participating, either because they had read my post or heard about the study from someone else. Subsequent telephone and email conversations with these students narrowed the list of potential participants as many were either ultimately too uncomfortable with the open-endedness of the methodology or were unable to resolve scheduling issues that would allow their participation. The eight students who did choose to meet with me and provide a narrative represented more than one Freedom School site, and were from several different parts of the United States. Since some states have only one Freedom School site, the specific Freedom School or state that individual interns represent are not identified more specifically in order that, as promised, the identity of the individual participants is protected.

I was concerned that there might be issues, due to a perceived relationship of power between myself, a professor and researcher, and the student study participants, which could undermine the narrative inquiry process. I needed each participant in this study to believe that he or she was the expert of his or her own life story and had the authority to interpret that experience in whatever way made sense to him or her and that I was merely an interested listener. In other words, the typical power structures between college student and professor and between undergraduate and graduate student had to be reversed during the collection of the narratives in order for my study to be trustworthy. What I didn't anticipate was how disrupted the power structure would be as I traveled to collect the narratives of these interns.

I often found myself wandering around completely lost in parts of large cities where my imagined status as a college professor or graduate student had absolutely no relevance to power. I was often completely out of my comfort zone and had many opportunities to admit my powerlessness and decide again whether this study was personally trustworthy or important enough to muster the courage and commitment to continue. Grumet describes autobiographical story-telling as risky business, even dangerous, (as cited in Casey, 1995, p. 219). I didn't anticipate how risky the process would feel to me as the researcher.

At one point a relative at whose home I was staying during an interview session told me that I simply must not go to "that part of town" because it wouldn't be safe for a woman, particularly a White woman. As I ventured to the interview site despite this warning I was reminded of the courage that the White students who participated in the original Freedom Summer project must have had as they boarded buses to begin a journey based on a personal ideology into a location where they were also warned they would likely not be welcomed or safe. I was also reminded of my own students' experience during the training week prior to their own CDF Freedom School experience when one felt compelled to call and ask if I was aware that they were the only White people there.

My experience was ultimately both safe and welcoming in each and every location and in most cases I felt as if I was welcomed onto the "sacred ground" (Glickman, 2003) of the CDF Freedom School community as a valued member. It was certainly my experience that narrative researchers "only gain control of their projects by

first allowing themselves to lose it” (Kleinman, Copp, & Henderson, in Kleinman & Copp, 1993, p.3).

I transcribed the audio-tapes of the narratives myself to further protect the identity of the study participants. Personally transcribing the tapes also allowed me to remember body language and nuances of the narrative that might not have been apparent to a transcriptionist not present during the actual interview, yet were important to be aware of during my analyses. The texts of the individual narratives were thematically analyzed and then compared to find inter-textual patterns of what was included or omitted, as well as explanations or interpretations of their lived experience prior to CDF Freedom School.

A community is defined as “any group having common interests, where there is joint participation or common ownership” (Frank, 2004, p.2). The participants of this study share membership in multiple communities using this definition. In particular they share an African-American tradition and experience in a CDF Freedom School program that creates a community that is “so intentionally inviting as to create an environment in which every person is cordially summoned to develop intellectually, socially, physically, psychologically, and spiritually” (Purkey, 1999, p.2). As members of these communities the interns share common values and use a shared language to talk about their lives and experiences in CDF Freedom School.

The collective interpretive voice, which can be heard in the collection of multiple narratives, is referenced by Nelson (1983) and Casey (1992) and I use it to analyze these narratives because the collective voice has the power to do what individual interpretative



voices cannot. . My analysis of the collective interpretive voice, what Casey (1992) calls the “collective subjective” is presented and discussed in Chapter four.

The eight servant-leader interns who shared their life-stories with me for this study provided an individual and collective perspective on who they are as people and how the Freedom School experience helped shape their lives and prepare them to teach. The original research plan was to analyze these narratives from a solely “collective subjective” (Gramsci in Casey, 1992) perspective, it now seems somewhat disrespectful to dismiss the importance of each individual life’s trajectory prior to the CDF Freedom School experience and so in this chapter, I will introduce the reader individually to each of these eight special people.

To omit the individual stories also might risk missing an important message about who comes willingly and allows themselves to be transformed by the CDF Freedom School experience, about how these individuals become teachers who have the potential and promise to change the world, their sources of strength, and the dispositional qualities of servant-leadership they bring with them as a result of something other than CDF Freedom School. To preserve the promised anonymity, although I suspect each intern would see this as an irrelevant detail, each servant-leader intern has been assigned a pseudonym that will be used from this point forward.

The life stories of these eight individuals are different in terms of the family and community structure into which each was born and lived, socio-economic status, gender, sexual-orientation and university affiliation. The stories also have commonalities, as the servant-leader interns in this study are all African-Americans and from their life stories

emerged common themes of family and faith as sources of strength, and community involvement. The interns use a shared language to talk about teaching, teachers and school as well as one which reflects a disposition of reflective optimism, which they use to explain the good that has or will come as a result of even the most difficult of circumstances. These themes will be used to guide and organize the analyses of these life stories prior to becoming a servant-leader intern in a CDF Freedom School.

### Ruth

#### Family and Faith as Sources of Strength

Ruth is a soft-spoken woman who was born and raised in the northern part of the Midwest. She told me that she had to “grow up early” when her father who was a preacher died in an accident when she was a young teenager. After this introductory statement, Ruth’s life story resumed in the present when she was in fact “grown up”. Although it is not included in Ruth’s narrative interpretation of her life, it can be inferred that a source of enormous strength must have been present which enabled her to grow up into the successful and articulate young woman who agreed to participate in this study. She describes herself as a person whose goal is to, “always stay in the learning page”. Ruth attends a large urban university and plans to enter graduate school next year.

#### Community Involvement

Ruth repeatedly emphasizes her commitment to finding assets for her community, presumably the African-American community, and explained that, “more problem-solution sort of people are needed in the world.” She says that she wants to be part of

trying to create change. She describes herself as a social activist who has always been involved in the community and recently developed a real interest in public health.

#### School Language

Ruth provides the shortest of all narratives but she was ultimately included in the study because of her concluding statement that, “You can’t teach teachers to care”. This simple proclamation provided a new lens through which I was able to see and begin to explore the complexity as well as the simplicity of preparing prospective teachers.

#### Sarah

#### Family and Faith as Sources of Strength

Sarah, who grew up in a large urban city in the southeast as the youngest of five children and the first potential college graduate from her immediate family, was a lively, bundle of energy during her interview and indicated that this level of activity had always been part of her personality. Like many of the servant-leader interns, Sarah describes her family as a loving two-parent support system for both herself and her brothers and sisters and said on multiple occasions that, “I had a really good childhood”. Sarah also credits her parents as providing a childhood where, “I got what I wanted, you know in a way, but they taught me just to be a leader.”

#### Community Involvement

Sarah attributes her personality as well as early school experiences with encouraging and developing patterns of behavior that resulted in various types of community involvement.

I was always involved, always active, always in something. My mother was like, “You never get tired.” I was just always was always doing something in the community and I always wanted to be different and just do things differently, just be involved. I feel like I always had to be doing something. I was never like a child that like I just could not just be doing anything.

During elementary school Sarah attended what she describes as a performance arts school and told me that she believes this experience explains a life-long involvement in the arts as well as the community.

I think that’s where I get a lot of that from, so like . . . just in dance and in art and all those different kinds of things, you know, I think that carried on to, you know, middle school and then even then I started cheerleading and getting with the Youth League and I was just always, always doing something in the community.

### Reflective Optimism

In high school Sarah applied and was denied admission to the high school of her choice and somewhat wistfully explains her experience while expressing no regrets about the ultimate outcome.

I always made good grades but I didn’t get into East High. I think at that time they were doing that whole ratio of you know how many students could go and that sort of thing, so you know my home high school was West High, and my mom was like, “No, I don’t want you to go there”, and my teacher was like, “So let’s see if we can get you into South High.” So I wrote this letter telling why I wanted to go to South and I got in and I loved it. I think that really changed and shaped what I wanted to do and like what I wanted to be, and you know just one of the best years I know. But you know I loved it. If I could, I would go back and do it again and you know, I don’t think I would change anything.

Sarah enrolled in a community college after high school despite having been awarded numerous academic scholarships because she was unable to achieve qualifying

scores on admissions exams despite multiple attempts. She also describes this experience as “life changing” explaining that although, “Lots of people say, I don’t want to go to a community college, actually my professors and my teachers were great.”

Sarah’s ability to perceive the positive potential or outcome of these situations, while acknowledging the less than positive specifics of the actual experience, seems important to note as this ability is reflected in multiple narratives.

#### School Language

Although Sarah told of an awareness of her interest in teaching early in her life as she very excitedly recounts asking her elementary school teacher, “Can I have all the worksheets that we’ve done? And I’d go home and play school for a like week or two”. Sarah later described how watching her high school teachers, “work with me, work with other students and really just get us involved and that sort of thing and I think it was like at that moment that I was like, “ok, maybe I’ll work with kids”; although she explained that as time for graduation approached she, “still didn’t know exactly what I wanted to do.”

Later when describing her community college experience she recounts that, “I had that whole family, that one on one I got and needed and seeing that I was like, I realized that I pretty much want to work with kids.” This part of Sarah’s story was delivered with an almost apologetic tone and then she continues by explaining that, “I was still like running away from teaching.” Like Sarah, many of the others in this study also voiced an initial resistance or reluctance to become teachers.

## Rebecca

### Family and Faith as Sources of Strength

Rebecca describes her family as “very religious” and explains that, “I had good positive morals and values that shaped who I am until this day.” She grew up in a small town near the Ohio River in a two-parent household and one older sister whom she said, “was a positive influence in my life.” As she starts her story Rebecca says that she comes from, “a very stable background. My family was a two-parent household, married for about seventeen years. We grew up in church and that is a good thing as well.” Later as she tells about wanting children of her own one day, she describes “someone else’s children” as “just the most innocent precious things in the world” and said that she had, “noticed that they were neglected.” Rebecca reveals at this point in her story, that as a child, “I knew that I grew up sometimes neglected and sometimes I had issues in the social realm. When we were younger we got teased and taunted. It hurt because I was a little bit heavy set so it really took a toll on me.”

Rebecca refers multiple times to strength drawn from her faith in God. At one point in a discussion about her parents’ efforts to dissuade her from choosing teaching as a career path she explains, “You know the Lord has brought me this far and I really don’t think He’s going to bring me to a point where I can’t handle it. You know, the Bible says that He won’t put on you more than you can bear if you stay in his will.”

## Reflective Optimism

Rebecca's interpretation of her experiences also provides a reference to the ability to be reflectively optimistic found in many of the narratives. She refers to these as the lessons that may be learned from life experiences.

Where I am from, you don't see a lot of African-American young women forwarding their education and wanting to do better. You don't really see that much where I'm from, so I grew up in a predominantly White institution. It just kind of taught me some lessons as well.

## School Language

Rebecca graduated with honors and described herself as, "always very competitive when it comes to academics or things that are going to enhance me as a woman." This is consistent with the description of academic focus and success found in other interns' life- stories.

Rebecca entered college and, "took my first teaching course and I loved it," but her path to traditional preparation was derailed when she was not able to pass a required entrance exam for the teacher education program at the institution she attended. "However, I did have some setbacks, um being a teacher, you know you just can't wake up and say, 'Hey I want to be a teacher,' you really have to work at it. You have to be able to take the ACT and score high." Although Rebecca was not able to continue in the teacher education program she still views herself as preparing to teach and says that she plans to, "go back and get my masters in teaching later on."

## David

### Family and Faith as Sources of Strength

David is one of several of the servant-leader interns who references a family member serving in some branch of the military, which provides an interesting connection with this particular study since the military has as its motto, “service before self.” David chooses to mention this connection as the beginning point of his story.

I was born in Massachusetts, which isn’t far from the military base and my mother was stationed there. I have a very tight knit family. My mom is from Georgia and most of my family lived there until they disbanded because most of them went into the military.

David also spent some time in the care of relatives while his mother was deployed. Upon her return he lived with his mother and two older brothers in what he describes as a, “very, very loving community in a duplex on the corner.”

David tells early and often in his story of the strong and positive influence of his mother, who raised him for the most part as a single parent.

Growing up my father was absent. In 1994 my mom got remarried to a man. They were married for four years. He was very nice, very loving, took me in as his own. But um, so the home environment was always a loving one when I grew up. I never had any traumatic experiences even though my father was absent for a long time and the time when a surrogate father stepped in my mother still played the role of the primary care giver. It was kind of funny on Fathers’ Day we still give her a card because she was mother and father.

### Community Involvement

David expresses a commitment to academic success as well as involvement with multiple extracurricular activities, which were part of his community



and similar to that found in many of the narratives. “Academics always came first so even when I didn’t have any friends the books became my friends. This year marching band still went well. I played better in concert band and track went better.”

### Reflective Optimism

The transition from middle to high school was reportedly difficult for David due to a move into a new school district. This part of his story provides evidence that David also has the same sort of ability to put a positive spin on a difficult situation found in other interns’ stories as he concludes that the move was, “for the best.”

During high school I had to change districts and I remember the day my Mom told me we were painting up the old house that I lived in because we moved into the new district three years prior. But she still let me go to the middle school because the new districts middle school wasn’t that good but she still wanted me to go to high school in that other district. So she told me that I wasn’t going to be going to that high school and I cried, I cried like, “Mom, why? Why?” Because all my friends were there from age five to now and I was like, “I won’t know anybody and I’m going to be alone and lonely and during high school”.

David describes that his first year of high school as difficult, yet he explains that it provides an opportunity for reflective growth.

My freshman year was really a hard year because it was not fun. I didn’t open up, I didn’t give people really a chance but I think it was for the best because it made me think. It gave me a lot of alone time to think about how I should be as a person and this changed my mindset yet again. It taught me how to be nice to everyone and to genuinely mean it when I’m nice to anybody.

Similarly, although David reports that his junior year was, “the hardest year academically in my life,” he put a consistently positive spin on the “hardest year” as he provides more explanation. “I took two AP classes. I was taking German and all this

crazy stuff, but it taught me a lot about studying habits. I am a procrastinator, but it taught me how to procrastinate successfully. That year it almost did really break me down but I persevered.” Another window into David’s determination to view the world through a positive lens emerges as he recounts putting forth a tremendous effort to qualify to join the track team during his freshman year in college only to be “red shirted” or essentially benched for the first year.

I’m practicing really well and he knows I’m working hard; and so he decides to red shirt me and keep me on for five years because one year is a practice year and four years to be active. And you know, I can respect that because I really wanted the college experience my freshman year and you know as an athlete you can’t always have the college experience. Red shirt was a really good thing for me.

David experiences finding biological siblings he wasn’t formerly aware of on a social networking system during his senior year of high school. Although telling about it is clearly painful he seems to view the experience as another “blessing.”

One day I just Googled his name (referring to his father) and my brother popped up because he was like a junior so and so. And so I clicked on it and I found him through MySpace. I feel like my family is complete now because I know him and he told me I have a sister and I’ve talked to them. It makes me feel a lot better and I don’t really have any remorse for it because I know things happen for a reason. And I feel like I’ve done better without him than with him. I think that finding him was really a blessing and I still haven’t met him in person but it just makes me really, really happy that I found him. It really does.

#### Teacher Language

David credits two of his elementary school teachers as being influential in his life. The first teacher David tells about is his kindergarten teacher, whom he says,

“was probably the best teacher I ever had. She’s the person besides my mother that inspired me to be a teacher because she cared for me so much.” David’s third grade teacher is also included in his story because she was, “very influential, not in conventional terms, because she was really, really mean; but it always taught me to be the better person.”

There is a sense that David is another servant-leader intern trying, somewhat unsuccessfully, to avoid teaching as a career. This is an interesting inter-textual pattern that emerges in the narratives, as servant-leader interns joined this study by first identifying themselves as preparing to teach.

I don’t really want to be a teacher per se, but I really do like kids. My mom is a teacher so she’s always saying you know you’re probably going to be a teacher, but you know, I don’t really want to be a teacher; do the same thing day in and day out and she’s like, “No it’s not the same thing,” but I don’t know, I’ll probably end up being a teacher.

## Mary

### Family and Faith as Sources of Strength

Mary was adopted at eight months of age along with an older biological brother into a military family. Mary describes the small military town where she was raised as also being a “home to lots of retirees”. Later in her story Mary describes this community as being called, “the matrix cause you can’t get out once you graduate from high school. Half my high school is pregnant or married or in the Army. I mean nothing’s wrong with that but you like to see young people have opportunities and go to college and stuff but

it's like they have no way out". Mary also tells of being raised by her mother after her parents separated shortly after she joined the family.

They adopted me, my older brother like he's a year older than me, like seventeen months; so they adopted him first and then they adopted me and we have older brothers and sisters but we were the only two put up for adoption. So, yeah, my older brother is seventeen months older than me; so he was adopted first and my Dad was in the military and my mom she works for the military. I was raised adopted. When I was eight months my dad left. My parents separated when I was one year old so I don't ever remember him living in the home and they were separated like a really long time and they didn't get a divorce until I was fourteen, but it seemed like they were divorced anyway. So um, but my mom did a very great job of raising me and my brother by herself.

The importance of the relationship with her mother is referenced multiple times in Mary's life story. At one point, Mary explains what she called a difficult transition from high school to college stating that, "It was a little difficult being on my own, not having my mom there." Mary also includes as parts of her life story that,

My mom and I have a really good relationship. She was my hero. She is the strongest person I know. I love her to death. If I wanted to be like anybody in the world it would be like her and the older I get the more I get like her cause you know, when I was growing up my mom was my best friend. Now that I'm in college my mom and I are starting to talk, and I think over the weekend we are going on a retreat or a trip or something do spa stuff, girl stuff. My mom has molded me into the type of person I am.

Mary, like many of the other servant-leader interns in this study shares as part of her story a personal faith, which provides a source of strength for her life. "I'm a Christian and so I try and pray about it. And that really calms me down and I see some insight from that. And I do a devotion and that's really my center and I think I've had a really good life just because I believe in God and I have that faith."

## Community Involvement

Mary was also involved in sports and music and recounts that, “I was in the marching band and I was in symphony and they played at Carnegie Hall one year. I did track and field. I did shot put and in my senior year I was ranked number two in the state.” Many, if not most of the interns articulate a similar history of extensive involvement in extra-curricular and/or community activities.

## Reflective Optimism

Information about Mary’s relationship with her father and brother is included in her story and indicates that Mary shares with other interns in this study an ability to look beyond the realities of the difficulty of the present or the past and be able to imagine the potential for positive change in the future.

When I was little I wanted that father-daughter relationship that all my friends had and I used to get really jealous because I didn’t have that. He went to Iraq my freshman year of high school and when he came back he was really different and he really wanted a relationship with me and my brother. I felt like I couldn’t trust my dad, but like last year I forgave him because I don’t like being mad about things like that so now we’re good and I have a little sister now.

Mary’s description of wanting a relationship with her absent father while seeking to understand his behavior as a function of first his military deployment and then the influence of his second wife concludes with a decision to forgive him and celebrate the presence of a new baby sister, who likely enjoys the paternal relationship that Mary described as personally desirable at the beginning of this portion of her story.

Mary's brother, who was adopted into the same family, is described as always having been an important part of Mary's life and gives her one more opportunity to reveal a clear disposition for reflective and projective optimism.

You know I love my mom to death, but she's always like, "That's your blood. If you love anybody more than me it should be your brother." So, me and my brother, even though we fought a lot when we were growing up; we became just friends you know we don't fight anymore. We go out together. We go to parties together. We have a really good relationship. He was in college but he's not anymore. I don't know how much you really want to know but my brother had been in jail, not anything too serious but for drug use and things like that and I feel like, it wasn't my mother because if it was my mother I'd have been in jail too but I feel like he didn't have a positive male role model. He's trying to get back on track and I pray for him every day. I really feel like he's getting himself back on track where he needs to be. He's smart, just easily influenced but I know he can do it.

The transition from high school to college was another difficult experience Mary relates as an opportunity to understand the racially motivated behavior of her peers and "turn a negative into a positive."

The transition was really difficult for me at first because the school was mostly White and I went to a diverse school and being from a military base you have a lot of different people coming in. So we didn't have just one set race, it was sort of a mixture and everything. It was different when I went to college I got a little culture shock because the Blacks only hung out with the Blacks and the Whites only hung out with the Whites and it was different. But I mean I still had a good time because I turned a negative into a positive and it was ok.

#### School Language

Mary describes herself as a "pretty good student who didn't make my first C until high school." Mary further explains that "C's were like F's to me so you know I tried to

keep my A's and B's", an attitude about academic performance expressed by other servant-leader interns in their own life stories.

John

### Family and Faith as Sources of Strength

As an only child and a self-described "Army brat" whose father was a Marine, John's introductory remarks conclude with a statement that, "I was an only child and that always had like a big effect on me". He says that he was raised to be independent because his parents, "didn't want me to turn out like the typical only child who was spoiled."

John also reflects the perception, similar to one described by many interns, that his faith in God provides a source of strength in his life. He explains as part of his story, which described losing several close family members to death or divorce that, "Obviously God is trying to show me something," and concludes that "It's just been a trying time but it's been a time of growth with me developing strengths and me being there not only for myself but for my family. Really, like I'm a stronger person." John said that he considers himself, "blessed cause you know someone always has it worse."

I've been through a lot. I've had seven deaths in my family in eight months and that's been really hard but God is good. I am blessed and things happen, but it has made me stronger, my family stronger and like I say, I have friends who support me. I'm a role model for some of my friends so my life has been very content. There's been some struggles, but I always like to say that somebody else always has it worse and I always try to keep that perspective. When I think about my life; it's been hard but I'm still overjoyed because I'm still here. I'm still making it. I always think that I have to go the extra step because I already have three strikes against me. One being that I'm Black, two that I'm a Black male, and three, that I'm gay, and a Black male. So that's three strikes that I already have against me. Society has like mashed and cast me down for those three

reasons alone and so I always try to keep my best foot forward. Like, I have no other choice.

### Reflective Optimism

Although John describes middle school as “really fun” and “interesting” it seems that John is another intern who has the ability to view the circumstances of life as opportunities for learning or at least having the potential for a positive outcome. After using the descriptors fun and interesting, John continues his story by explaining that,

The transition for me from fifth grade to sixth grade was very interesting probably because I was really finding myself. I got picked on a lot for my masculinity. I was constantly arguing with people. I was having self-image issues. I wasn't comfortable with myself, like I was just basically trying to find myself you know from that age, from eleven to fourteen.”

John's describes high school as “really fun” and said that he, “loved high school.” He says that his freshman year, “was like a regular freshman year, still got teased a little bit, but it was like I was so comfortable with myself that I really didn't care. People enjoyed that about me.” John includes details about his junior year in high school that make it clear that the realities of that time period in his life were not fun or loveable.

From the time I was sixteen to seventeen; that's when I was really going through a lot of things with my parents. I was having a lot of personal issues with them you know, like I constantly had an attitude I was always bitter about something and part of that was basically because everything I went through as a child. Just like me being an only child and my parents splitting up and I didn't have any way to vent so I bottled that up for years and years and years and with people picking on me and stuff like that. And so it just all came out in my junior and senior, well my junior year it was just like a lot. It was like a lot and so then it was towards the end of my junior year that I told my parents that I was gay.



Strikingly, this very turbulent time in his life begins with a general statement of the fun and love it provided and concludes with the happy ending that seems to reflect what emerges as a typical theme in the stories of the servant-leader interns in this study.

I stopped being so insecure about myself. I knew who I was, I still am. It took me eighteen years to do it but it paid off and I'm really happy. I'm content with my life right now. I'm just really happy with my life thus far and I can honestly say despite everything that I've been through that it's worth it. It made me the person that I am today.

#### School Language

John evidently enjoyed and felt that he was successful in elementary school as he describes it as, “a blast.” “I got good grades, I was on the basketball team. I participated in everything.” As mentioned earlier, John describes middle school and high school as “really fun” and said that he, “loved high school.” This use of positive superlative language to describe school is shared with other servant-leader interns.

#### Elizabeth

#### Family and Faith as Sources of Strength

Elizabeth reveals very few details about her family or life other than, “I come from a small family. My mom is from Tennessee. We'd go there a lot when I was little and I have a family of four. I have a younger sister and I stuck with it and I just recently graduated from the university.”

#### School Language

Elizabeth is the only intern in this study who describes an early and evidently unwavering desire to become a teacher. She expresses early in her story that “I've

always had a teacher instinct since I was little.” As an African-American student in a public school Elizabeth describes her experience as, “a public traditional school with a primarily Caucasian population and we didn’t have any classes in cultural background.” Elizabeth’s narrative focuses almost exclusively on her life as a servant-leader in a CDF Freedom School (included in the analyses and discussion in Chapter three) after stating that, “I got my bachelors in elementary education and I plan to teach fourth or fifth grade when I start teaching.”

### Grace

#### Family and Faith as Sources of Strength

Grace also describes growing up in a close family with one younger sister small rural town in South Carolina. While living in the same house for her entire life, she says that, unlike many African-American families, her family did things together like taking family vacations.

We took trips to Tennessee, to Pigeon Forge, places like that, just with family. A lot of families that are African-American back in the eighties seemed to not take family trips like that. So that’s one thing I really appreciate about my family and that’s one thing that stands out about my childhood, it is that we really did things together. And we’re still together and my parents are still together and stuff like that.

Later Grace reveals another glimpse of her life prior to college as she recalls,

I came in from being the only little Black girl in my town and everybody brought their lunches to school and everybody’s mom picked them up after school and everything was all hunky-dory. We were fortunate to have a stay-at-home mom who could stay with us during the summertime.

A strong Christian influence in Grace's life is also evident as she explains that her family is, "Church of Christ affiliated, so we're Christian. I've grown up in the same church my entire life." Grace's father recently became a preacher when the father of her best friend died and her father felt "called" to serve.

I never thought I'd be a preacher's daughter or a preacher's child whatever until he took that on about two years ago. And he took that on because my best friend, her dad came up with the ministry. When he passed from a seizure, my dad thought that it was his calling and took on the ministry. And so that happened so now I'm a preacher's kid.

Grace recently graduated from a southern university with a traditional undergraduate teacher preparation program. She is currently employed in the office of a CDF Freedom School site in a large city that operates, in addition to the traditional five-week summer program, several after-school programs during the school year.

#### School Language

Elementary and middle school experiences are, for the most part, generalized into one overarching and characteristically positively superlative statement that she, "loved it. It was awesome, an awesome experience" although she also includes the following statement almost as an afterthought, "Out of four hundred children in elementary school, I was the second only Black at the school so I sort of grew up that way."

In this chapter the life stories of the individual servant-leader interns provide shared themes of family, faith, and the belief that people are basically good and acceptable even if their behavior is not acceptable or understandable. There is also an ethos of service present in their lives, learned perhaps as members of families that share

an African-American tradition or are part of a military or faith community. In the next chapter I present a theoretical framework for an educational system that has a spiritual focus and discuss a practical application and exemplar of that model as study participants who were servant-leader interns in a CDF Freedom School interpret their service-learning experience as servant-leader interns in the program.

### CHAPTER III

#### A MODEL OF SPIRITUAL EDUCATION

“It's time for greatness -- not for greed. It's a time for idealism -- not ideology. It is a time not just for compassionate words, but compassionate action.” *Marian Wright Edelman*

In the previous chapter I present the theoretical framework for narrative methodology; a description of the application of that methodology as it was used in this study; and analyses of the narratives of the individual study participants. In this chapter I discuss what education could look like if it had a spiritual focus and present CDF Freedom Schools as an exemplar of that model through the collective interpretive experience of the servant-leader interns.

#### Discussion of Theoretical Model

A theoretical model for an educational system, which has a spiritual focus would recognize that the hearts and souls of people who are directly and indirectly engaged in the educational system are of primary importance. This type of spiritual focus is consistent with an ethos of service which is embodied in the concepts of servant-leadership, service-learning and in the CDF Freedom School program. This model, which puts people and relationships first, would provide the lens through which all other parts of the educational system are considered.

Spirit is the voice of the future beckoning to the present. The distinctive thing about human beings is our ability to hear that voice, feel addressed by it, and find meaning in life to the extent that we respond to it (Lerner, 2000, p.35).

This model clearly would be the antithesis of prevailing educational systems, which seem often to ignore or deny the very humanness of people.

The idea that human beings are unique in their fluid and responsive existence is argued by Shapiro who suggests that,

The one thing we can say about human nature is that it is in our nature as human beings to transcend our own apparent limits. The extraordinary gift of human beings is that we can, in fact, make ourselves different tomorrow from what we are today (Shapiro, 2006, pp. 49-50).

A discussion of what a spiritual focus would be seems to require a well articulated definition of spirit or spirituality, “but every attempt to define it in itself rather than in its manifestations end up seeming silly, empty, or vague. The realm of Spirit is the realm of the ineffable. It simply can’t be adequately expressed in language” (Lerner, 2000, p. 32). Michael Lerner identifies an aspect of spirit as a giant and continuing cosmic experiment which, “transformed the planet’s very substance into a web of living beings of astonishing variety, beauty, awareness and capacity for intelligent choice” (Lerner, 2000, p.33). Lerner also describes spirit as the,

ultimate consciousness that pervades, sustains, and includes All Being, and yet cannot be reduced to any part of it and is not separate from other aspects of Being but is that through which All Being exists and becomes manifest to us and to itself (Lerner, 2000, pp. 34-35).

Given the difficult, perhaps impossible task of clearly articulating a definition of spirit, which might provide more semantic understanding of what a spiritual focus in education implies; it is perhaps more reasonable and productive to stop searching for one

cognitively and admit the folly in embarking on such a quest. For education to have a spiritual focus and for us ultimately to live in a more just humane world, we must as a society, begin searching our hearts and souls for educational experiences and perspectives that value and provide focus on the hearts, minds, souls and potential of the people involved in the educational process.

Spiritual education centers on personal growth, which will solve more social ills and material problems than any other sort of educational orientation aside from any worldly payoff, personal development may also be the main purpose of life (Moffett, 1994, p.331).

Our hegemonic society places great value on sorting and labeling the people in it as more or less worthy depending on test scores, gender, sexual orientation, and ability to be “normal.” This model of education, which is not spiritually focused, pretty effectively leaves out everyone, alienates us from one another and from ourselves; and leaves everyone in a perpetual state of wanting and wanting to be something other than what we have and are. Michael Lerner writes of restoring “wonder and awe” in education. Both of these require an awareness of the present which goes unnoticed as we are all busy waiting for the things we will get or do or achieve at some point that is always just beyond our reach. (Lerner in Shapiro & Purpel, 2005, eds., p.333)

Essentially, every part of what we know and have known, as a system of “education” must be transformed. The very heart of a spiritually focused education or society seems to begin with a sacred understanding of the complete worth and value of all people, only and simply because they are also human. Martin Buber, a utopian Zionist and philosopher described this as an I-Thou relationship, which requires us,

to place ourselves completely into a relationship, to truly understand and be there with another person, without masks, pretenses, even without words. The bond thus created enlarges each person, and each person responds by trying to enhance the other person  
(<http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/biography/Buber.html>).

Although only a completely transformed educational system would be required to have one with a spiritual focus, the language of possibility described by critical social theorists encourages us to not only “blow the horn of awareness” (Shapiro, 2006, p. 190), but also actively begin to move toward the most spiritually focused educational system we can imagine. In her book, *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria: And Other Conversations about Race*, Beverly Daniel Tatum uses an airport terminal moving walkway to illustrate that in order to avoid an inevitable destination (in her book: racism and in this case an alienating educational system devoid of a spiritual focus), merely turning your back is not enough. Active movement in the opposite direction at a speed greater than the walkway is moving is essential for a different outcome.

If your goal is to create a human being who is loving, capable of showing deep caring for others, alive to the spiritual and ethical dimensions of being, ecologically sensitive, intellectually alive, self determining and creative, there are ways of restructuring education to foster this kind of person (Lerner, 2000, p. 234).

This is what Purpel & McLaurin (2004) refer to as a sacred commitment of educators who “must stop hiding from their responsibility to make clear statements on the moral and spiritual dimensions of various educational policies and practices” (Purpel & McLaurin, 2004, p. 142).



If we are to educate a new generation so that their lives are richer and more purposeful than our present dominant values would allow, we must ensure that the desire for, and the capacity to build, meaningful communities is an integral part of what education is all about (Shapiro, 2006, p. 67).

The creation and nurture of schools as communities is essential and those communities must value in theory and practice what Nell Noddings describes as a “culture of care” (Shapiro & Purpel, 2005). According to Shapiro (2006), “Compassion is inseparable from real community” (p. 77).

Educator and author Carl Glickman describes a community that bonds learners together as being “sacred ground” (Glickman, 2003). School communities must be sacred places where “I-Thou” relationships are always present and no member of the community is disenfranchised or silenced. CDF Freedom School provides this sort of “sacred ground” community.

All too often schools reinforce messages that the media proliferates with images of valuable people as the technologically contrived rich, perfect, airbrushed characters seen on television and in magazines. Since few, if any real people meet these ridiculous standards, students learn to devalue themselves. This is especially true for students of color who also rarely see anyone who looks like them in the library or textbooks provided in most classrooms or hear about the accomplishments and contributions of people of color apart from the obligatory “Black History Month”.

A spiritually focused educational system demands a curriculum and pedagogy that are inclusive, relevant and responsive to all students. Ladsen-Billings defines culturally relevant pedagogy as that which is, “specifically committed to collective, not merely

individual, empowerment” (Ladsen-Billings, 1995, p. 160). She suggests that this pedagogy is rooted in the principles of academic success for students; student development of cultural competence; and the development of a, “critical consciousness through which they challenge the status quo of the current social order” (Ladsen-Billings, 1995, p. 160). I define culturally responsive teaching as the continuous and conscious process of re-conceptualizing the teacher’s self so that each student is no longer the “other,” longing to become something more desirable or valuable than what he or she is. “What is to be done with respect to others...depends on who I think the Other is, and who I think I am in relation (to) that person” (Smith, 1996, p. 458).

Perhaps in some ways alienation has become a type of self-protection for people who live in a world and in educational systems in which they cannot imagine being worthy of connection, care, or inclusion. One of the most disheartening characteristics of the institution of school as we currently know it is that the longer students stay in the system, the more alienated they seem to become.

Community does not mean sameness- indeed, sameness or uniformity has usually killed the energy and involvement of many students who see their own lives and experiences far removed from what schools attempt to teach them. This process demeans and silences our students, as the classroom becomes a place that is quite foreign to their homes, neighborhood or community (Shapiro, 2006, p. 72).

A model of spiritually focused education that provides a “sacred ground” educational community requires that school spaces and structures be transformed from rigid, test-driven factory-like institutions that have well-defined and articulated preconceptions of normal and successful, into fluid spaces where the primary goal is to

discover and realize the potential of all students and teachers as co-creators of the experience. Maxine Greene describes this as the, “provision of spaces where choices can be made” (Greene, 1988, p. 120). According to Greene, these spaces depend on a culture and climate of care and respect for the individuals involved and a sense of connectedness created by a teacher who,

rather than posing dilemmas to students or presenting models of expertise, tries to look through students’ eyes, to struggle with them as subjects in search of their own projects, their own ways of making sense of the world, to interpret from as many vantage points as possible lived experience, the ways there are of being in the world (Greene, 1988, p.120).

Another transformation required for a spiritual model for education would alter the way in which dialogue occurs in the educational system. School dialogue must be what Noddings and Freire describe as, “a fundamental component of the care model” (Shapiro & Purpel, 2005, p. 300). This school dialogue must be structured so that it no longer impedes the development of any true relationship with other people by focusing on the “accurate” point of view or correct answer. This also implies that everyone (students, teachers, parents etc.) is engaged in the dialogue without prior knowledge of what the outcome will be. In other words the hierarchy of power is effectively dismantled.

It is imperative for an educational model with a spiritual focus to create spaces of time for each individual to explore and nurture a relationship with him or herself. “Spirituality is nourished, not through formal rituals that students practice in school, but by the quality of relationship that is developed between person and world” (Miller, as

cited in Kessler, 2000, p. 18). Schools must provide opportunities for silence and reflection.

Words are not the sole medium of exchange in teaching and learning-we educate with silence as well. Silence gives us a chance to reflect on what we have said and heard, and silence itself can be a sort of speech, emerging from the deepest parts of ourselves, of others, of the world (Palmer, 1998, p. 77).

There are often periods of silence in traditional schooling, but rarely for the purpose of dialogue with self, meditation or reflection. Most periods of silence in the schools most students attend can be attributed to boredom or apathy created by irrelevant meaningless activity or in compliance with an arbitrary “no talking” rule imposed by those in power.

When soul is present in education, attention shifts. We listen with great care not only to what people say but to the messages between the words and then we concentrate on what has heart and meaning. The yearning wonder and wisdom, fear, and confusion of students become central to the curriculum (Kessler, 2000, p. X).

Curriculum materials should be creative, relevant and responsive to the needs and desires of the people in the learning community, as well as those, which provide inspiration for hearing the, “voice of the present beckoning to the future” (Lerner, 2000, p. 35). These elements are essential and transformative aspects of a spiritually focused educational process in which, “the development of creativity and imagination enable us not only to understand but to build, make, create, and re-create our world” (Purpel & McLaurin, 2004, pp. 40-41). These elements are most certainly present in the CDF

Freedom School program as it is described by the Children's Defense Fund and by the students in this study who experienced it as servant-leader interns.

Finally, a spiritually focused education must broaden the boundaries of community and family to include the world and all people in it. Global and Peace Education must be part of the transformation. "The world is just a little place, just the red in the sky before the sun rises, so let us keep fast hold of hands, so that when the birds begin, none of us be missing" (Dickinson as cited in Lerner 2000, p. 138). Only an educational system that is spiritually focused provides the possibility for responding to the Spirit voice that beckons us toward a transformed world.

Spiritual education is practical not only in generating more knowledge and power but in keeping them within a safe, holistic context where consciousness and culture nourish each other. Spirituality is practical not only in what it can enable you to do in the world but in how it can free you from the world (Moffett, 1994, pp. 26-27).

The CDF Freedom Schools provide this sort of practical model of education with a spiritual focus.

As the narratives of the eight servant-leader interns transitioned from interpreting life before becoming a CDF Freedom School servant-leader intern into an interpretation, which includes Freedom School, they begin to speak in a clear and collective voice. This collective voice, rather than the individual ones, is used to analyze CDF Freedom School as part of the life story in order to try and understand how, or if, this spiritually focused experience transforms the servant-leader interns who serve in it. Casey suggests that analyzing the collective subjective, "significantly enlarges our understanding of a

complex phenomenon and can result in the radical reconstruction of the researcher's own understanding of the problem" [emphasis added] (in Goodson, 1992, pp.205-206). Clear themes emerge from an analysis of this collective and compelling voice about what Freedom School is perceived and understood to be, learning to teach, and how the experience changed them.

### CDF Freedom School: An Exemplar of the Model

The Children's Defense Fund Freedom School model has historic roots in the original Freedom Schools that were part of the 1964 Mississippi Freedom Summer Project. This Freedom Summer program was part of the civil rights movement and was primarily designed to assist African-American communities with community planning and voter registration. It was a catalyst that empowered many of the young people involved to see themselves as able to enact change. "When freedom school students from across the state gathered for a convention early in August, their increased confidence and political awareness were manifest in their approval of resolutions asking for enforcement of the Civil Rights Act of 1964" (Moses, 1998, p.1). A goal of this Freedom Summer project was to establish a summer enrichment program where Black children could be taught reading and math that would supplement the inferior educational system that was available to them in Mississippi during that time period (McAdam, 1988). This part of the project was known as Freedom School. The Freedom School model was, "reborn in 1992 under the leadership of Marian Wright Edelman and the Children's Defense Fund's Black Community Crusade for Children program to advance this transforming vision of education for all children" (Children's Defense Fund).

## Marian Wright Edelman

Marian Wright Edelman grew up in South Carolina and is the daughter of a Baptist minister who instilled an ethos of service in his children. While attending law school at Yale University, she became involved with the Freedom Summer project and worked to register voters in Mississippi. As an attorney for the NAACP in Mississippi and the first African-American woman to practice law in the state she began focusing her work for social justice by becoming a voice for children. After she married an aide to Senator Robert Kennedy she moved to Washington where she helped organize the Poor People's Campaign. This campaign eventually led to the establishment of the Children's Defense Fund (CDF) in 1973. Mrs. Edelman's life reflects her commitment to an ethos of service, which is manifested in the mission of the Children's Defense Fund and the language and components of the CDF Freedom School program. Servant-leader interns in this study describe the program in ways that reveal their knowledge of both the founder and the history and philosophy of the model:

It's a great program. It started with the poor people's campaign in the 1960's and it's been around for decades and it has grown tremendously. I really think that it's necessary that we have programs like Freedom School. It's for education majors and I said, 'Oh, can you get me a contact number for someone?' and I go home and looked up the Children's Defense Fund on the internet and I see this amazing website and I said, 'I have to be a part of this movement.'

Another intern echoes her understanding of Mrs. Edelman's philosophical vision for the CDF Freedom School program.

Marian Wright Edelman had her vision of how she wanted the world to be. She wanted all children to have health care, she wanted all children to be equal, she wanted all children to have a quality education but we're seeing that that's not happening.

### The CDF Freedom School Structure and Philosophy

Freedom Schools are promoted by the Children's Defense Fund as, "nurturing environments that promote children's strengths and abilities and are not remedial, nor oriented around a child deficit model" (<http://www.childrensdefense.org/helping-americas-children/cdf-freedom-schools-program/about/core-beliefs-educational-philosophy.html>). The description of CDF Freedom Schools provided by the interns concur that this model is grounded in a positive value system.

Freedom School I think is a really great place. It teaches respect. It teaches a value system like family. It teaches values like how to give back to your community, how to make a difference in your country and the world and its just overall how to be a well-rounded person.

The curriculum and daily schedule for all Freedom Schools are quite structured and prescribed beginning with Harambee and concluding with a debriefing session for the teachers. Harambee, a Kiswahili word that means "Let's all pull together." (<http://www.harambeecentre.org/>) is described as a thirty minute, "morning tradition where all the scholars and interns come together to dance, sing, do cheers and chants, and get ready for the day" (<http://www.seigleavenuepartners.org/whatsnew.html>). Harambee is described by the interns in this study as a favorite and important part of the program.

I'm trying to think of my favorite part of Freedom School. My favorite part of Freedom School would have to be Harambee time. Love the cheers and chants. I



love being in charge. I love seeing how the children look up to you as a role model when you're dancing in front of them.

Another intern agrees about the significance of Harambee.

It would be amazing if we had Harambee in every school each day. Our kids would want to come to school everyday. Our teachers would want to come to school everyday. You should see the look on the volunteers' faces when they come to read. We start Harambee with the Hallelujah chorus, that's nationwide, and their eyes get bigger and they're like, "We want to stay all day."

Another intern raises an important question about the Freedom School approach and whether it would be accepted by traditional school.

The Freedom School curriculum is different. It would definitely work in school but I'm not sure it would be accepted. People don't like change. They say it's working, we don't need to change it, but is it really working? Every time I was in my classroom teaching I was like, why can't school be like this? Why can't school be like this?

The IRC or Integrated Reading Curriculum provides the structure for the academic part of each Freedom School day. The five-weeks of lesson plans are published and prescribed by CDF and supported by a library of approximately one-hundred books, selected by the Children's Defense Fund staff, which each Freedom School site is required to purchase.

It's an awesome, awesome experience and something great to look at. A day would start out with the opening activity and you would talk about how to lead them up to the book that you're going to be talking about for the day cause we like read a book every day. And you have them kind of wonder, what are we going to do today. This book looks cool, like for instance it could be *Freedom is On the Menu*.

This library of books written for, by, and about people of color who are positive role models support the program theme: *I Can Make a Difference in My: Self, Family, Community, Country, and World.*

(<http://www.childrensdefense.org/helping-americas-children/cdf-freedom-schools-program/start/>). The interns were specific as they described this component of Freedom School both in terms of content and perceived outcomes for the students, which are supported in the literature (Philliber Research Associates, 2008). This curriculum seems to be consistent with Ladsen-Billings' (1995) description of curriculum that is culturally relevant and a necessary component of a model of spiritually focused education. Interns say:

IRC is our integrated reading curriculum. Loved every single bit of that. When you're reading to them they want to read back to you. Since I did it two consecutive years I've had students come back to me and say they are doing better in school now, as far as reading.

They enjoy reading. It's just not like they can; they actually enjoy what they're doing. I can tell a difference. Just seeing not only what a difference I can make, but what a difference we can make as college students. And you're always constantly thinking on your toes about what you could make better in your classroom so the kids can get a better experience with the book.

And then once you get them settled into the groups you get to work together in cooperative group activities and the next thing you know you'll look up and everybody's got their heads down and their pencils going and the mood is just right and you've got some nice music playing in the background and the kids are really enjoying what they are doing. I mean I've had kids write poetry. I've had kids write rap about the books that they've reading. I had kids put on a skit in my class about Rosa Parks, and they're six years old.

Classroom management, particularly in terms of how the teachers, who are the servant-leader interns, in a Freedom School perceive the students they teach and how they respond to misbehavior is included as an important part of the Freedom School experience and reflects the sort of empathy and vision necessary for a model of education that is spiritually focused and also described as qualities of servant-leadership in the literature (Patterson, 2003; Spears, 2004).

The way our curriculum is set up to really make the child think and really have them take ownership. Freedom School creates human interaction. You are interacting with other humans – maybe smaller than you. Here at Freedom School we don't have rules but we have expectations for the children.

One intern describes the importance of the language used by the curriculum and the teachers in the program.

It's all about the language that we use with them about how we make them feel empowered. I want these kids to know that someone loves them and cares about them enough to set boundaries for them and let them know if they are doing something wrong and what it is and why they are getting consequences. I had a problem with students not liking other students in the classroom and they use the hate word, I hate him, I hate her and so I had to just stop the curriculum and we had a serious heart to heart. You know, how we need to love each other and, how if we don't come together we can't succeed.

We had watched the Children's March and I said, 'Do you think that those children back then had problems like this where they were arguing about silly things?' They were worried about fights to be integrated and I just talked to them seriously and let them know that even though you feel like you don't have anybody else who is a positive influence, you know you have me to look up to and other interns and we are here for you. When you come in here and do stuff that is disobedient we aren't going to turn you away because we care about you. I know you may be used to that but we care about you.

## Learning to Teach and Transformation through Service-Learning

All of the interns in this study identified themselves as college students who wanted to be teachers. Interestingly during the narratives, all but one of these eight young people reveals a current or previous reluctance or resistance to becoming teachers. The CDF Freedom School experience is used as a reoccurring example of how and where the interns identify themselves as wanting to be teachers and the place where they learn to teach. Freedom School is summarized as a place where, “teachers learn to be truly decent people”, and is about, “who cares enough to teach.” It also appears to be a place where interns believe they are changed.

I did Freedom School because I’ve always wanted to work with children. I didn’t ever want to be a teacher. I knew that but I wanted to work with children in some way but I thought Freedom School would be a good opportunity for me to make sure I knew what I wanted to do. So I thought well, let me go to Freedom School and make sure I want to do things with kids.

And I love working with the kids and everything like that and I’m probably going to end up staying with children. And being with the kids for the first year, I was like I want to be a teacher. That was what changed me. I think the first year in a Freedom School is actually what changed me.

Some of the interns also express the contribution of family members on their decisions to become teachers. This influence in some cases was not terribly encouraging about teaching as a career choice.

My parents honestly don’t want me to go into the education field knowing that back then around that time and still to this day there were a lot of sexual harassment charges to teachers and children. You know they were looking at the news and saying do you really want to be in an environment with children in that setting and people could accuse you. Do you really want to be in an environment where kids could pull out a knife on you?

Not all parents were quite as negative about the prospect of a career in teaching, in fact one mother, a teacher herself, provides encouragement to consider it as a desirable option.

I don't really want to be a teacher per se but I really do like kids. My mom is a teacher so she's always saying you know you're probably going to be a teacher. But you know, I don't really want to be a teacher, do the same thing day in and day out. And she's like, "No it's not the same thing", but I don't know, I'll probably end up being a teacher.

It is clear that the interns believe that CDF Freedom Schools, particularly the required training component, which occurs prior to being in the classroom with children, have had a profound impact on teaching them how to be teachers. The national training is a seven-day required experience held at the University of Tennessee and the Alex Haley Farm each summer prior to the beginning of the five-week Freedom School program. The training program consists of a series of workshops, speakers and films planned to acquaint the interns with the program model and curriculum as well as develop an awareness of the Freedom School agenda of social justice. Jackson (2006) found that, "A well-planned preparation curriculum and fine pedagogical techniques worked in conjunction with providing systematic support for intern development" (p. 152).

This seven-day training seems to be interpreted by the interns as the catalyst for transformation as they repeatedly refer to it as "eye-opening" and "life-changing".

Then I went to training and it really was a life changing experience just the talking and the speakers. It really opened my eyes to a lot of new things like I'm going to be a better person because of it.

Multiple interns provide additional voices that echo their perceptions of the power of this experience.

We went to the national training and they had so many wonderful speakers like Jeff Johnson and Marian Wright Edelman and just everybody coming to speak to us and it was a real eye-opener for me and I was really changed by it. Freedom school doesn't just help the scholars but the interns as well.

The experience I had during the training aspect, I think that is what makes a Freedom School intern pretty much a Freedom School intern. It's the training you get before you really begin working in the classrooms.

When you actually see it on film and through activities and stuff like that they let us do it's just, that's the eye-opening thing when you really see it happening. I don't know where they get their films or video clips at but if I see something it's more believable than just reading it.

I came here I didn't know anything so I feel like I was one of those people who learned. I'm African-American, Black but you know at the same time I was like, I don't know what's going on. I didn't know the children were Black, that's the first thing I said when I started. It was training in Tennessee that helped us, a seven-day training where we not only learned the curriculum but we learned the history of how Freedom Schools got started.

We learned statistics of some of the parents and children that have been a part of Freedom School. That kind of thing was an eye-opener for me. I don't know any other way to really learn this kind of stuff because just learning it in an African-American history book, is not going to teach you this. We go to a lot of forums about how Freedom Schools got started.

The interns also compare the preparation to teach they experience at the university unfavorably with that of learning to teach in a CDF Freedom School.

I learned way more by being in this (Freedom School) environment, the one-to-ten ratio, the workshops, the training, the experiences, everything. I've learned

way more than what I learned at the university. It's just crazy to me because this is really what we need.

This perspective echoes in the way in which other interns compare the experience to teacher preparation at the university.

At the university in our education classes we just learned the basics about becoming this great teacher but we didn't learn about how to deal with different children and different kinds of learning abilities. You would think we would learn that but, no, we just learned, like I said, how to be that successful teacher, how to deal with children who apparently are all the same cause that's how they teach us.

You know there's going to be some child in there in your classroom who doesn't have a father. How do you teach that child who is slow on reading? At the training in Tennessee I learned more of that than, I've always said that, I learned more than a semester at the university about the quality of education, about teaching children. If everyone got the training, the seven day training, we would have way better teachers. It's like I'm prepared for anything.

Jackson (2006) describes the training as an “induction process for becoming activists in a national social justice movement” (Jackson, 2006, p.145). The training component of this program is described in Jackson's study as an induction process with, “two salient themes of this induction-learning history and being embraced” (Jackson, 2006, p.14). A series of speakers, films, and role-play experiences during the week begin the process of creating teachers who know themselves, value their students, and may provide an avenue for preparing teachers who, “can make a difference in both the lives of students and in the quality of life in general have the courage to take risks, to look into the future, and to imagine a world that could be as opposed to simply what is” (Giroux, 1989, p. 215).

It is unfortunately the case that, “most teacher education programs have been, and continue to be, entirely removed from a vision and a set of practices dedicated to the fostering of critical democracy and social justice” (Giroux, 1989, p. 186). Howard, 1999; Gay, 2000; and Ladson-Billings, 1995; concur that changes are needed in the curriculum of teacher education, which are consistent with the CDF Freedom School experience and training model. They suggest that a curriculum designed to produce culturally relevant teachers would include: (1) gaining socio-cultural consciousness, (2) developing an affirming attitude toward students from culturally diverse backgrounds; (3) developing the commitment and skills to act as agents of change; (4) understanding the constructivist foundations of culturally responsive teaching; (5) learning about students and their communities; and (6) cultivating culturally responsive teaching practices (as cited in Jackson, 2003, p. 42).

The CDF Freedom School model embraces the transformative characteristic of culturally responsive teaching described by Gay as helping students,

develop the knowledge, skills, and values needed to become social critics who can make reflective decisions and implement their decisions in effective personal, social, political, and economic action. It guides students in understanding that no single version of "truth" is total and permanent (Gay, 2000, p.131).

In this chapter I discuss a theoretical model of what a spiritually focused educational system might be like and present the CDF Freedom School program as an example of a practical application of this model through the interpretive voice of the servant-leader interns. This “collective subjective” interpretation helped me understand how a service-learning experience as a servant-leader intern in the CDF Freedom School



program provides a transformative experience for pre-service teachers. In the next chapter the literature regarding service learning and servant-leadership, particularly as they are considered as a model for teacher education, is presented and discussed. I also analyze the narratives of the interns for the presence of dispositional qualities consistent with an ethos of service.

## CHAPTER IV

### SERVICE-LEARNING THROUGH SERVANT-LEADERSHIP

“Service is what life is all about.” *Marian Wright Edelman*

In the previous chapter I discuss a theoretical model of what a spiritually focused educational system might be like and present the CDF Freedom School program as an example of a practical application of this model. I also present my analysis of the collective interpretive voice of the servant-leader interns, which provides me with a better understanding of how the CDF Freedom School experience serves as a catalyst for transformation for pre-service teachers. In this chapter I present a review of the scholarly literature in the areas of service-learning and servant-leadership and discuss how that research is applicable to the field of teacher education. I also present three organizing themes that reflect an ethos of service that I developed from my own reading and study in the area of critical social theory and servant-leadership which I define and use to analyze the narratives for the presence of these thematic qualities.

#### Review of Scholarly Literature

Teaching has often been referred to as a service profession and most teacher educators and the programs in which they work are evaluated, at least to some degree, on their service. Service learning experiences are included in many teacher education programs and even more express an interest in developing them (Anderson, Swick, & Yff, eds., 2001). Service-learning is,

often defined as an approach to teaching and learning in which service and learning are blended in a way that both occur and are enriched by the other and involves intentionally linking service activities with the academic curriculum (Cairn & Kielsmeier, 1991, as cited in Anderson, Swick, & Yff, eds. 2001).

A rationale for including service-learning in teacher education was developed by Anderson and Hill (n.d. in Anderson, Swick, & Yff, eds. 2001). This rationale includes ten principles: preparation to use service-learning as a pedagogy; achievement of teacher education standards; development of habits of critical inquiry and reflection; increase in familiarity and skill with educational reform initiatives; personal and social development; social justice and appreciation of human diversity; and democratic citizenship (Anderson and Hill, n.d. in Anderson, Swick & Yff, eds. 2001).

Several common obstacles to service-learning were identified by Wade, Anderson, & Pickeral (2000 as cited in Anderson, Swick & Yff, eds. 2001, p. 88). Time was the primary obstacle that emerged from their review of the research.

Teacher education faculty recounted difficulties finding time to plan for and implement service-learning, cited lack of acceptance and interest in service-learning among colleagues and noted the difficulty of including service-learning in programs already rigidly constrained by national and state standards and institutional requirements” (Root & Furko in Anderson, Swick & Yff, eds. 2001, p. 88-89).

The terms service-learning and servant-leadership are sometimes used interchangeably, “Both service learning and servant leadership create experiences through which individuals can discover what leadership means and learn to help others” (Zimmerman-Oster & Burkhardt, 2000, p.17). Servant-leadership, however requires more commitment than service or learning or even the two intentionally integrated and

was defined by Robert Greenleaf as, “a long-term, transformational approach to life and work – in essence, a way of being- that has the potential for creating positive change throughout our society” (Spears, 2004, p. 8).

Although service-learning provides for the intentional inclusion of service through learning experiences in teacher education, it does not necessarily serve as a catalyst for the transformational approach to life described by Greenleaf. Servant-leadership as a true conceptual framework is absent, perhaps misunderstood or ineffectively implemented in higher education programs, which prepare new teachers. Greenleaf described his vision of servant leadership by asking two questions,

Do others around the servant-leader become wiser, freer, more autonomous, healthier, and better able themselves to become servants? Will the least privileged of the society be benefited or at least not further deprived (Greenleaf, 1977, p.7)?

Spears (2004), the president and CEO of the Robert K. Greenleaf Center for Servant-Leadership describes a servant-leader having the following characteristics:

- Listening to identify the will of a group and to help clarify that will, seeking to listen receptively and engaging in periods of regular reflection
- Empathy or striving to understand and empathize with others assuming good intentions without rejecting the people even if it is necessary to refuse to accept behavior or performance
- The potential for healing oneself and others – servant-leaders recognize they have an opportunity to “help make whole” those with whom they come in contact

- Awareness, particularly self-awareness that lends itself to being able to view most situations from a more integrated, holistic position. They have an inner serenity.
- Persuasion seeking to convince rather than coerce compliance
- Conceptualization – the ability to dream great dreams
- Foresight, a characteristic which enables the servant-leader to understand the lessons from the past, the realities of the present, and the likely consequences of a decision for the future
- Stewardship, defined by Peter Block as “holding something in trust for another”
- Commitment to the growth of people, servant-leaders believe that people have an intrinsic value and is deeply committed to the growth of each and every individual
- Seek to identify some means for building community

(Spears, 2004, pp. 9-10)

#### Servant-Leadership as a Theoretical Model for Teacher Education

Adopting a model of servant-leadership in a school of education requires a commitment to the, “long-term, transformational approach to life and work -a way of being- that has the potential for creating positive change throughout our society” (Spears, 2004, p.8) described by Greenleaf. This commitment would be for and to both the leaders and those being led who are according to Greenleaf, “better able themselves to become servants” (as cited in Spears, 2004, p.8). .

In teacher education, the teacher educators are assumed to be the leaders and the pre-service teachers in their programs are those being led. What would it mean then for students in teacher education programs to become wiser, freer, more autonomous, healthier and better able to become servants? A servant-leadership model seems to also imply that faculty in schools of education are not only leaders but also led, by deans, school chairs and individual program coordinators. What would it mean for those teacher educators to also become wiser and freer or any of the other qualities suggested by Greenleaf? What could nurturing servant-leader qualities in teachers and prospective teachers mean for the health of the institutions in question?

A model or conceptual framework of servant-leadership consistent with Greenleaf's vision would certainly mean a more humane school experience for both students and teachers in K-12 and higher education but would require a transformation of the current values and practices of teacher education. This model and the resulting humaneness of the experience is described as present in the CDF Freedom School program by the servant-leader interns who work in it as the teachers.

A desire for teacher candidates or teacher educators to become wiser and freer is contrary to the increased articulation of detailed curriculum, pedagogy and evaluation standards currently mandated and evaluated both at the state and national levels. In their work reporting the obstacles to service learning, Root and Furko described the current system as "rigidly constrained by national and state standards and institutional requirements" (Root & Furko in Anderson, Swick & Yff, eds. 2001, p. 88-89). A wiser,

freer system of preparing teachers would require the elimination of standards that constrain, oppress, and stratify and replace it with a system that nurtures and empowers,

in which all those involved are full citizens, each of whom has the inherent right of personal and social fulfillment, each of whom has inherent and full dignity, and each of whom has the inherent right to grow, learn, and create as much as he/she possibly can (Purpel & McLaurin, 2004, p.115).

The need for increased depths of knowledge, which can be measured, as a way of improving or reforming teacher education is clearly articulated in the literature (National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, 1996; National Council for Teacher Quality, 2008, Taskforce on Teaching as a Profession of the Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy, 1986; Holmes Group, 1986, Goodlad, 1990 as cited in Cochran-Smith & Zeichner, eds. 2005) and currently drives many reform efforts. Suggestions for reform efforts to focus on increasing wisdom or what Shulman (2004) refers to as the primary aim of any professional preparation to, "develop and shape a robust moral vision that will guide their practice and provide a prism of justice, responsibility and virtue through which to reflect on their actions" (p. 530) is rarely heard beyond the voices of Shapiro (2006); Purpel & McLaurin (2004); Kozol (2007); Edelman (1992) and the CDF Freedom School program.

Wisdom is described by Nicholas Maxwell, a British philosopher, as "the capacity to realize what is of value in life for oneself and others" (Maxwell, 2004 as cited in MacDonald, 2006). Thus, it seems important for teacher education programs with a true conceptual framework of servant-leadership to include opportunities for future teachers and those who teach in them to discover what their values are though developing what

Covey (2004) describes as Spiritual Intelligence defined as, “the central and most fundamental of all the intelligences because it becomes the source of guidance of the other three and helps us discern true principles that are part of our conscience” (Covey 2004, p. 53).

Unfortunately for many people, including prospective teachers and teacher educators, the process of becoming educated is “not just benign or neutral-, it fracture(s) them. Their creativity, their humanity and their capacity to imagine are at the very least, unsupported and in some cases actively hampered” (Olson, 2009, p.4). E.F. Schumacher suggests that,

At present there can be little doubt that the whole of mankind is in mortal danger, not because we are short of scientific and technological know-how, but because we tend to use it destructively, without wisdom. More education can help us only if it produces more wisdom (E.F. Schumacher, 1973 as cited in Macdonald, 2006).

Shulman (2004) seems to agree that higher education values knowledge over wisdom as well as technical practice over service.

The moral dimension remains in the background. The demands of learning the necessary research and theories, as well as becoming technically adept in the many skills and practices, tend to subordinate the service dimensions (Shulman, p. 531).

Nicholas Maxwell suggests, “that academia could greatly increase its value to society if it switched its focus from the search for knowledge to a search for wisdom” (as cited in Macdonald, 2006). Searching for wisdom rather than knowledge would reframe



the content and pedagogy of teacher education as well as the assessment systems that determine who is ready to be licensed to teach and who is not.

Servant-leadership is also described as “healing, intuitive, and compassionate and promotes a stance that looks to the future while caring intensely about the present” (Gabelnick, 1997, p. 4). The servant-leaders in this study consistently interpret their experiences in the CDF Freedom School program as nurturing or promoting all of those qualities. Herman and Marlowe (2005) suggest that, “by promoting Greenleaf’s idea of leader (teacher) as ‘servant first’, we can give direction to both teacher and student as we strive to change from a classroom of order to a community of caring” (Herman & Marlowe, 2005, p.175). This sort of community of caring is present in the CDF Freedom School and should be a model for developing teacher education programs with Servant-leadership as the conceptual framework. This program presents a model for the creation of compassionate, caring classroom communities where basic human needs are met and spiritual healing is an essential if not the primary goal.

Remarkable similarities emerge from the narratives of the servant-leader interns in terms of dispositional traits, which encompass qualities and characteristics described in the servant-leader literature (Patterson, 2003; Spears, 2004) and which reflect an ethos of service. The presence of these particular dispositional qualities may help explain why certain individuals choose to participate in a CDF Freedom School experience and also how those qualities may be enhanced or nurtured by the experience.

## Ethos of Service: A Thematic Analysis

The eight college students in this study represent a wide variety of lived experiences, family structures and domiciles. They are similar in that all are African-American college students who say they want to become teachers and all have experienced at least one summer as a servant-leader intern in a Children's Defense Fund Freedom School. They are very clear about their understanding of who and what a servant-leader is and the passion and commitment needed to do the job. The specific language they choose to use as they articulate their position is consistent with the language used to describe the qualities of servant-leadership and the principal tenets of the CDF Freedom School philosophy.

A servant-leader is one that cannot only lead children but they are also willing listen to others, listen to the children, take responsibility, someone that's energetic and fun-loving and genuine. I think genuine is the key. If you're doing this for a little summer job, go to Chick-fil-A. You really need to love children and have a passion for helping others to be a servant-leader and you can't come in judging.

My own study and understanding of critical social theory as well as service-learning through servant-leadership were used to develop three organizing themes that reflect and describe the shared ethos of service in the collective interpretive voice. These themes are: having a spiritual focus in relationships; an articulated philosophy consistent with Tikkun; and a language that is reflectively optimistic and acknowledges the possibility of healing.

## Spiritual Focus in Relationships

The interns brought with them into the Freedom School summer an expressed disposition for accepting and valuing the people in their lives. They clearly were able to

Theme Descriptor	Definition
Spiritual focus in relationships	This quality encompasses those of Agapao love, humility and empathy described by Patterson (2003) and Spears (2004). Patterson (2003) developed a model of servant-leadership that includes a sequence beginning with the leader's agapao love, which leads to humility, altruism, vision, trust, empowerment and concludes with service. Agapao is a Greek verb, while the more familiar form of this word, agape is a noun (Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words). It is also consistent with the I-Thou relationship described by Buber (1923). In I-Thou relationships, all people including self are believed to have value and are described as worthy and full of potential simply because they are. In these relationships there is an assumption of good intentions and a focus on what will draw people together rather than alienate them from one another.
Philosophy of Tikkun	Tikkun, a Hebrew word that means, "to heal, repair, and transform the world ( <a href="http://www.tikkun.org/article.php/community_page">http://www.tikkun.org/article.php/community_page</a> ) and describes a philosophy of personal responsibility and commitment to an agenda of social justice.
Language of Possibility and Reflective Optimism	This theme encompasses a perspective, which acknowledges an awareness of the realities of the present and the past while speaking in a language of possibilities about the future; in some cases because of the lessons that can be learned or good that can come of the past or present. This is the expressed as a vision that there is always the potential for healing self and others.

reject the behavior of individuals without alienating themselves from the relationship. This is particularly evident in descriptions of the behavior of family members as they describe painful life experiences. Mary tells about wanting a relationship with her absent father while seeking to understand his behavior as a function of first his military deployment and then the influence of his second wife. She concludes with a decision to forgive him and celebrate the presence of a new baby sister, who likely enjoys the paternal relationship that Mary described as personally desirable, yet unattainable at the beginning of this portion of her story.

When I was little I wanted that father-daughter relationship that all my friends had and I used to get really jealous because I didn't have that and then he went to Iraq my freshman year of high school and when he came back he was really different. He really wanted a relationship with me and my brother but it was kind of too late because we had been without him for so long. He was always good on child support but he didn't call as much as we would like and we didn't visit so when he came back from Iraq; it was kind of like, why are you calling us all the time? Then he got remarried and that put a rip in our relationship. The lady he married, I know, like evil step-mother, but it wasn't like that. It was just different because he always took her side and it kind of put a rip in our relationship because I felt like I couldn't trust my dad. His mind was so warped by her and we've had our falling out because of it but like last year I forgave him because I don't like being mad about things like that so now we're good and I have a little sister now. He had a little baby, so I have a little sister now.

David shares a similar dispositional tendency when talking about his stepfather who was in his life only a short time before leaving the family. "My stepfather, after he divorced my mother, tried to come back in my life which was appreciated, but I understand it's been a strain on him and her, so that was cool". One of the most obviously painful situations in this intern's life is described tearfully, yet with a

characteristic attempt to understand or make sense of the incomprehensible while assuming that it was somehow all for the best.

Also my senior year I found, well, really that summer I found my biological brother and sister that my father had, um . . . without my mother and one day I just Googled his name (referring to his father) and my brother popped up because he was like a junior so and so. I clicked on it and I said to my friend, ‘Does that look like me’? and she was like, “Yeah that looks a lot like you.”

And so I wrote him a big long letter and everything (begins crying and apologizing for doing so). It happens every time but it’s a good, a really good feeling (now sobbing while still trying to talk) because I feel like my family is complete now because I know him and he told me I have a sister and I’ve talked to them and it makes me feel a lot better and I don’t really have any remorse for it because I know things happen for a reason and I think that finding him was really a blessing.

This part of his story concludes with an explanation that he hasn’t yet had an opportunity to meet the brother or sister because his brother is too busy playing football to find time to meet, although he has been invited to attend one of his games which, “. . . just makes me really, really happy.”

John also provides evidence of a spiritual quality in his relationships when he describes his relationship with God while telling about the death of several family members.

I’ve had seven deaths in my family in eight months and that’s been really hard but God is good. I am blessed and things happen but it has made me stronger. There’s been some struggles but I always like to say that somebody else always has it worse and I always try to keep that perspective.

He also reveals this spiritual quality when referring to the relationship he has with himself. “I stopped being so insecure about myself. I knew who I was, I still am. It took

me eighteen years to do it, but it paid off and I'm really happy. I'm content with my life right now."

Yet another intern explains that a move to a new school where he didn't have many friends, "gave me a lot of alone time to think about how I should be as a person. It taught me how to be nice to everyone and to genuinely mean it when I'm nice. I try to do better for myself, even if others don't want that for me, I always want that for others."

As the interns begin talking about the CDF Freedom School experience it becomes clear that this spiritual way of being in relationship with themselves and with other people is supported and nurtured by the program. One intern explains that, "Freedom School creates human interaction. You are interacting with other humans. We're people interacting with people." A similar message is reiterated by others using slightly different words which seem to mirror those in the CDF Freedom School Program literature. "They (the Freedom School children) all have need and they should all be respected. They should all have a fair start, a healthy start, and a moral start."

In Freedom School where, according to one intern, "teachers learn to be truly decent people," it is clearly her relationships that she values above everything else.

I had a problem with students not liking other students in the classroom and they use the hate word, I hate him, I hate her and so I had to just stop the curriculum and we had a serious heart to heart. You know, how we need to love each other and how if we don't come together we can't succeed. You know one student he was like, "I don't care about nobody". He ended up crying and telling an intern, "I really do care about them but I don't want nobody to know because they might hurt me like my mom hurt me when she gave me up for adoption when I was five" So he came back and ended up telling us he really did care about us and you know he was telling everybody that he loved them and he would be there for them. The kids were crying and it was like emotional. Every summer from the beginning to the end the kids really do change from the time they start. The way

they treat themselves and the way they treat others and the way they treat adults. So Freedom School really does help a lot. Just meeting and being around people who want to make a difference made a difference with me.

### Philosophy of Tikkun

Tikkun, a Hebrew word that means, “to heal, repair, and transform the world” ([http://www.tikkun.org/article.php/community\\_page](http://www.tikkun.org/article.php/community_page)) describes a philosophy of responsibility and commitment to an agenda of social justice. I chose Rabbi Learner’s explanation of who embraces the philosophy of Tikkun because it resonates with my own philosophy and also with those of Marian Wright Edelman (1989; 1993;2000) and the CDF Freedom School program.

All those whose deepest values lead them to challenge the ethos of selfishness and materialism that has led people into a frantic search for money and power and away from a life that places love, kindness, generosity, peace, nonviolence, social justice, awe and wonder at the grandeur of creation, thanksgiving, humility and joy at the center of our lives (<http://www.tikkun.org/article.php/core>).

The Children’s Defense Fund advertises that it is also, “committed to reclaiming our country, our core values and spiritual foundation for our children and families” (cdf.org). The interns in this study articulate both a pre-disposition to an ethos of service as well as an enhanced awareness and commitment to a personal agenda of social justice that they attribute to the Freedom School experience. Jackson (2006) concludes that, “Knowledge about the history of social justice movements, skills on how to enact social action and dispositions towards serving beyond one’s classroom are all reflected in the kind of teacher preparation for social justice offered by Freedom Schools” (Jackson, 2006, p. 145).

As I describe in individual analysis of each intern's life prior to the CDF Freedom School experience, many of the interns had extensive patterns of involvement in their residential, school, ethnic or faith communities and they explain that, "Growing up, my mom always taught me that it was good to work in the community with those groups like Habitat for Humanity and Red Cross Blood drive and feeding the needy, even reading to the elderly."

CDF Freedom School nurtures a philosophy of community service and is described by the interns in this study as a program that intentionally, "teaches values like how to give back to your community, how to make a difference in your country and the world and it's just overall how to be a well-rounded person." During the five-week summer Freedom School program the interns and children are engaged in a social justice project, which became for at least some, an opportunity to apply and deepen their commitment to this philosophy. Several interns recount their experiences with social justice this way.

It's an awesome program and for me myself personally I think it's made me open my eyes as far as like being real with myself and being real with the scholars and making sure that you know, me and the scholars are touching base with each other because sometimes I mean you just look at kids and you think they're just kids, they don't have an opinion but at Freedom School they do have an opinion. They do have a voice. They do have a say.

We are doing social action and that's what we can do to give back to the community. We are writing letters to our senators. We are writing letters to our mayor and we're having the media come in and we're cheering and chanting for health care for all kids. These kids do have a voice. They do have something to say and I think um for me personally it just opens my eyes to see that kids are hurting. Kids need somebody to talk to someone to reach out to.



It just makes me more aware that I should be there for children. Like I've seen so many people who don't really know what they want to do and don't care about the community and you'd think a lot of people would but they don't and so being around a lot of people who really care about the community has really made a difference with me. It pushed me to do a better job and be more involved in my community so that's one way that Freedom School really made a difference with me.

The interns see and describe themselves as agents of change in the CDF Freedom School environment and consistently say that, "We are trying to create change."

Every summer from the beginning to the end the kids really do change from the time they start. The way they treat themselves and the way they treat others and the way they treat adults. A lot of kids don't know how to positively treat each other, you know, positive ways. They talk bad to other people because of home. That's the way they get talked to. They don't know any other way.

They don't love other people cause their parents don't show them that love and a lot of my kids at the beginning of the summer when I would give them hugs were shy and say, "No don't hug me" and by the end they give hugs everyday. Freedom School, this environment, the loving environment, it just helps a whole lot. It alleviates the stress that they go through, get their minds focused. It really helps a whole lot.

In many cases these African-American interns relate that a personal experience helped them understand a familiar societal issue from a different perspective and explain how the CDF Freedom School community helps empower and transform them.

A lot of the African-Americans aren't afforded the opportunities and like the lowest literacy for children is African-Americans. If you can't read you just automatically go to prison or get in some type of trouble and that's what they really focused on in Freedom School and that really opened my eyes. I've seen it. I didn't know what it was called but I've seen it; like my brother. I didn't talk about this but, I don't know how much you really want to know but my brother had been in jail, not anything too serious but for drug use and things like that. I feel like he didn't have a positive male role model and I've seen it in his friends

too because the people he hangs out with are going down the same road and I feel like if they had had Freedom School their literacy would have been better and they wouldn't have been in the trouble they are in. So for me that hit home because I've seen it. It really changed me as well. Just meeting and being around people who want to make a difference made a difference with me.

In several cases the interns came to Freedom School with an enthusiastic commitment to serve and then had an experience, which deepened their own understanding of the problems and role they could play as teachers. "I was really pumped when I came to Freedom Summer. My summer goal was to make a difference in just one child's life."

Some of these parents should be ashamed of the way they send their children to Freedom School and the way some parents talk to their children. Like this one boy said he doesn't tell anyone that he loves them because he said, "One day I told my mom I loved her and she left." Things like that, things like that I don't want my children to ever be going through something like that. 'Cause these kids a lot of them act out because they don't get that attention at home and a lot of them, they like to get hugs you can tell they don't get a lot of hugs at home.

So I want to reach out to children who kind of go through those things in their life and I wanted to make sure that every child feels special in some way. You know you never know what a child is going through and so you should be prepared for that as the teacher when they come through the door.

The interns also believe that, as teachers in the program, they are able to make a positive difference in the academic deficits they observe in their students. The servant-leader interns see themselves as prepared and transformed by Freedom School to be change-agents in the lives of their students and agree that, "We're not only changing the lives of the kids but this is also helping us in our daily lives as well."

A lot of them are behind in reading. I mean we've got fifth graders on a first grade reading level. It just needs to stop. It needs to change I feel like as servant-leader interns we can change that by doing this program and that's why I wish not only that so many more children came to Freedom School but we had a lot more interns to do something about this.

### The Language of Possibility and Reflective Optimism

The language of possibility and reflective optimism that emerges in the narratives of the servant-leaders in this study reflects what Paulo Friere describes as, “a new awareness of self, a new sense of dignity, and ultimately an experience of hope” (Freire, as cited in Slattery, 1995, p. 199). The self-awareness the interns consistently express in their narratives seems to allow them to, “become prophets who orient the educational process toward a vision of ultimate meaning and infuse education with the sacred” (Purpel, as cited in Slattery, 1995, p.73). This awareness of self also provides the sort of educational experience in the CDF Freedom School environment that David Smith describes as one which, “must not simply tell us what we are, but most significantly, what we hope to become, to bring into the center of our research conversation everything that we are, as a way of reconciling in the present moment our ends with our beginnings” (Smith, as cited in Slattery, 1995, p. 73). Self-awareness, I believe, is also at the heart of culturally responsive teaching and an ethos of service and is nurtured through servant-leadership in the CDF Freedom School model.

The servant-leader interns repeatedly use the phrases “eye-opening” and “life-changing” as they describe the CDF Freedom School training and teaching experience. As one intern reflected, “I think Freedom School made me open my eyes as far as like being real with myself.” This awareness, which according to the interns is due to the

CDF Freedom School training and experience, “emphasizes the individual’s own capacity to re-conceptualize his or her autobiography, recognize connections with other people, recover and reconstitute the past, imagine and create possibilities for the future, and come to a greater personal and communal awareness” (Slattery, 1995, p.77). The interns describe not only a greater self-awareness but also an appreciation for themselves and their potential.

It’s just made me have a great appreciation for who I am as a person and where I’m going. Freedom School really helped me as a person to grow to know more about myself, to know more about my history. I went to training and it really was a life changing experience just the talking and the speakers. It really opened my eyes to a lot of new things like I’m going to be a better person because of it. I was really changed by it. Freedom school doesn’t just help the scholars, but the interns as well because I have a really good positive outlook on children and life in general.

The servant-leader interns speak in a language of possibility and reflective optimism about teacher education and school experience in general. They seem to believe that CDF Freedom Schools provide hope for a very different system of learning to teach and teaching because there is a demonstrated commitment to internal and external changes which embody a belief that, “Hope must replace despair as the central practice for students and teachers, regardless of race, class, religion, gender, or age” (Slattery, 1998, p. 197).

A school classroom, according to bell hooks, “remains the most radical space of possibility” (hooks 1994, p. 12) and provides the potential for transforming the people in it. CDF Freedom Schools situate their classrooms in a culture where that potential is

realized. The perspective that the classroom provides the potential for transformation is supported by Maxine Greene who suggests that,

These spaces depend on a culture and climate of care and respect for the individuals involved and a sense of connectedness created by a teacher who, rather than posing dilemmas to students or presenting models of expertise, tries to look through students' eyes, to struggle with them as subjects in search of their own projects, their own ways of making sense of the world and to interpret from as many vantage points as possible lived experience, the ways there are of being in the world (Greene, 1988, p.120).

Jackson (2006) concludes that CDF Freedom Schools realize that transformative potential as they, “serve as a counter narrative for students, parents, communities, and the servant-leader interns who serve as teachers in contrast to the continued inadequacies of public education for children of color, particularly African-American children, and poor children” (Jackson, 2006, p. 16). The interns in this study seem to be very aware of the potential and possibilities the CDF Freedom School model and experience provides for them as future teachers.

I learned way more by being in this (Freedom School) environment, the one-to-ten ratio, the workshops, the training, the experiences, everything. I've learned way more than what I learned at the university, Just how to deal with and build those relationships. It's just crazy to me because this is really what we need. It's like I'm prepared for anything.

Some of the interns articulate the potential for the university to be educated about CDF Freedom Schools and seem hopeful that the universities would use the information to improve teacher education.

If they could have a representative come and speak at the university and tell them about Freedom School and offer them a chance to experience it or even just come and observe it. If I had got that chance when I was a junior or sophomore I would have learned a lot and would have took a lot back like when I was student teaching.

Other interns share this vision of the CDF Freedom School program influencing traditional programs of teacher education.

I just wish it could be a model across all subjects and have the same discussions that relate everything back to their lives and everything. The universities need to be involved in some sort of way.

I learned more than a semester at the university about the quality of education, about teaching children. If everyone got the training, the seven day training we would have way better teachers.

The interns seem equally hopeful that if traditional schools became more like the CDF Freedom Schools they would have the potential for being more like the spiritually focused model of education I describe in Chapter three.

Every time I was in my classroom teaching I was like, “Why can’t school be like this? Why can’t school be like this?” And they’re learning. They’re learning. They want to read. They want to come. It would be amazing if we had Harambee in every school each day. Our kids would want to come to school every day. Our teachers would want to come to school every day.

Just knowing that I’m instilling some sort of happiness. It makes me happy. When I’m making them happy makes me happy. At Freedom School we don’t have rules but we have expectations for the children. It’s all about the language that we use with them about how we make them feel empowered.

I love Freedom School. I think that we should incorporate the Freedom School Curriculum into our regular school curriculum because I think that if you really saw the model it would work.

In this chapter I present a review of the scholarly literature in the areas of service-learning and servant-leadership and discuss how that research is applicable to the field of teacher education. I also present three organizing themes, developed from my own reading and study in the area of critical social theory and servant-leadership which I defined and use to analyze the narratives for the presence of these thematic qualities. In the fifth and final chapter I summarize the study conceptually and suggest ideas and questions that should be considered for future research agendas.

## CHAPTER V

## CONCLUSION

“Education is for improving the lives of others and for leaving your community and world better than you found it.” *Marian Wright Edelman*

In the first chapter, I provide an overview and rationale for the study and a discussion of my interest in this topic. I also present the research questions that are used to guide the study. In the second chapter, I present a theoretical framework for narrative methodology and an introduction to the study participants through the interpretive voices of their individual life stories. In Chapter three I present a theoretical model for a spiritually focused educationally system and I suggest that CDF Freedom Schools provides an exemplar of this model.

Finally, in the fourth chapter, I provide an overview of scholarly literature relevant to service-learning and servant-leadership, particularly as they are relevant to teacher education. I also present a thematic analysis of servant-leader qualities as a part of an ethos of service developed out of my own study of both servant-leadership and critical social theory, which emerge in the collective interpretative voices of the study participants. In this fifth and final chapter I present a conceptual summary of the study, the methodology and the conclusions I draw from the findings. I also suggest some ideas and questions that may be used to guide reform efforts in teacher education or future research agendas.



Narrative research as a methodology is most certainly “risky business” (Grumet, as cited in Casey, 1995). Not everyone who indicated interest in participating in the study was willing to put him or herself in what was evidently perceived to be too vulnerable a position. In fact, many of the participants who agreed to the protocol I suggested, attempted at least once during the interview to alter the methodology asking, “Couldn’t you just ask me some questions?” One participant stated that it might be easier if we could just “talk about it over coffee” while another remarked, “This is really hard.” after earlier stating excitedly, “I get to talk about my life; this is going to be fun.”

Narrative research was also risky business for me as the researcher, and there were times when I was not sure I had the energy or the courage needed to sustain or complete the study. During the study I had to summon the courage to go into parts of cities I was told would be unsafe, and trust that if a participant agreed to meet me, they would. I also had to face losing control of the study by truly releasing the power of how much, if any, of a narrative would help answer the research question, to the servant-leader interns who agreed to tell their own stories in their own ways.

I found that not only was the product of the study autobiographical for the participants; but as the researcher drawn to particular research questions because of my own life-story, it also became an internal and profoundly personal autobiographical experience for me. This was a process, which allowed me, as a teacher educator, also to, “develop a new awareness of self, a new sense of dignity, and ultimately an experience of hope” about the work that I do (Freire, as cited in Slattery, 1995, p. 199).

Public education and the systems we use for preparing new teachers are not working for their students. The drop-out rate for students living in poverty and students of color exceeds fifty-percent (Editorial Projects in Education, 2007, as cited in Alliance for Excellent Education 2007). Decades of studies suggest that students are profoundly impacted by the attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors of the teachers they have (Center for Public Education, 2007) and so it is therefore, critical to improve ways in which teachers are prepared, regardless of those teachers' own gender, ethnicity, or cultural background, so that each is effectively responsive to each and every student in his or her classroom.

Teacher education must begin to acknowledge that without transformation, there is no education, only the collection and measurement of minute to vast amounts of information with varying degrees of interest but largely without the ability to have or create meaning. Some suggest that the catalyst for reconstruction or transformation of teacher education is the teacher educator.

In the education of teachers probably no one factor is more important than the social attitude of the faculty of the professional institution. We must then as fast and as far as is humanly possible, bring it about that all members of the professional staff hold an intelligent and positive social outlook. Without this we can hardly hope for socially prepared teachers" (Kilpatrick, et.al. 1933 as cited in Zeichner, 1990, p. 18).

This reform focus in teacher education implores teacher educators and their students to hear what Maxine Greene described as "the horn of awareness" and participate in a "waking up" process that,

provokes us to reach beyond ourselves and become empowered to think about what we are doing, to become mindful, to share meanings, to conceptualize, to make varied sense of our lived worlds (Greene, 1988, p. 12).

### Suggestions for Research

The research questions that guided this study were developed from my own need to find meaning in my own life-story, particularly the part of it that includes my professional life. In many ways this study was my own quest to experience “a long-term, transformational approach to life and work – in essence, a way of being-that has the potential for creating positive change throughout our society” (Spears, 2004, p.8) and specifically for creating positive change in the way in which pre-service teachers are prepared.

CDF Freedom School is “blowing the horn of awareness” for pre-service teachers more effectively than I could imagine. Study participants routinely described the CDF Freedom School training, which is a seven-day version of teacher education, as “eye-opening” and “life-changing.” Although I assumed that the whole CDF Freedom School experience was responsible for the transformation, I now believe that further research is needed that may reveal how the components of the training are correlated with creating a transformational experience for pre-service teachers, and which may be replicated in some form in traditional programs of teacher education.

The voices of the pre-service teachers are sparse in the literature yet are, perhaps, our best hope for reconstructing the system so that we are able to find and use a, “robust moral vision that will guide practice and provide a prism of justice, responsibility and virtue” (Shulman, 2004, p. 530). More studies should attempt to engage these pre-service

teachers in narrative monologues or dialogues that contribute their voices, as authors of their own experience, to the discussion.

CDF Freedom Schools provide a culturally relevant curriculum that is conceptually and practically consistent with the theoretical models of spiritually focused education and servant-leadership. The individual and collective voices of the servant-leader interns who shared their life stories with me during the course of this study interpret the CDF Freedom School program as an “eye-opening” transformational experience that could help shape a new and better vision of school and teacher education that can be used to inform and guide their practice and my own.

It is important to find out if pre-service teachers who have been awakened by the CDF Freedom School experience are able to “stay awake” once they begin teaching in public schools. Further research is needed to discover whether the five-week teaching experience and/or the seven-day training are successful in preparing teachers who are able to take this ethos of service into the classroom in a setting apart from CDF Freedom School; maintain a disposition of reflective optimism, a philosophy of Tikkun and a commitment to a spiritual focus in their teaching practice.

#### Suggested Reform Strategies for Teacher Education

I will use the lessons shared from these CDF Freedom School servant-leader interns to engage in efforts to reform the learning community I create in my own classroom and suggest that there are reform strategies worthy of consideration by all those who as teacher educators are willing to embrace a philosophy of servant-leadership so that the students we are leading into the profession may “become wiser, freer, more

autonomous, healthier, and better able to become servants and for the least privileged of the society to benefit or at least not be further deprived (Greenleaf, 1977, p.7).

#### Course Design and Pedagogy

The traditional “sage on the stage” style lecture classes typical in many traditional undergraduate programs must be replaced with seminar style learning communities where students and teachers have an equal voice and curriculum is constructed based on the needs of the students rather than the construct of a textbook or expertise of the instructor. In *Letters to a Young Teacher*, Jonathan Kozol (2007) seemed to suggest a similar shift, “from soul-destroying practices and terminologies of experts who are positive they know “what works” within the unjust and unequal system they no longer choose to challenge or denounce but who seem to know only too little of the hearts of children (Kozol, 2007, p.238).

#### Program Focus and Goals

There must be a shift from the goal of producing teachers as the outcome of the program to one of focusing on the individual health and spiritual growth of the people in the program and their potential for wholeness. There must be an institutional commitment to the growth and health of every individual based on the belief that the people in the program, both students and faculty, have intrinsic value. Additionally, investigations of relationships must be intentionally included in our courses believing that, “both the implicit and explicit values of a people get mediated through relations. What is to be done with respect to others depends on who I think the Other is, and who I think I am in relation (to) that person” (Smith, 1996, p. 458).

### Regular Time for Meditating, Reflecting and Developing Inner-serenity

This time must be scheduled and protected for both students and professors to actively begin and engage in an ongoing process of self discovery which allows everyone to “open their eyes” and see history as an autobiographical process and situate themselves as an integral part of, “an unfolding story in which each is an active participant in shaping the meaning of events and in constructing the future ” (Slattery, 1995, p. 95). To that end examining events of the past, and present while considering events of the future will support self awareness and reflection that, “emphasizes the individual’s own capacity to re-conceptualize his or her autobiography, recognize connections with other people, recover and reconstitute the past, imagine and create possibilities for the future, and come to a greater personal and communal awareness” (Slattery, 1995, p.77).

This capacity is consistent with the quality of foresight suggested as one of the qualities found in servant-leaders (Spears, 2004). Time for meditation and reflection might possibly provide the potential to become, nurture and develop servant-leaders who are self-aware and able to view situations from a more integrated, holistic position which could allow them to begin to “dream great dreams”(Spears, 2004).

### Intentional Community Building

Servant-leaders “seek to identify some means for building community” (Spears, 2004,p.10). Laurie Frank defines a community as, “any group having common interests, where there is joint participation or common ownership” (Frank, 2004, p.2). Creating an individual class or entire teacher education program where there is a sense of community

would require the inclusion of verbal and non-verbal communication skills, consensus building and collaboration skills, team and trust-building experiences at a minimum.

Being “in community” with other people requires that those people know one another. The need for this to occur more intentionally became crystal clear for me as a researcher and a teacher during this study as I realized that I knew more about the lives of the students in my study, who were generally in my presence for about an hour, than I do about the lives of the students I teach for months at a time. I believe that courses in teacher-education programs housed in schools of education and all “the factors of people, places, policies, programs and processes should be so intentionally inviting as to create an environment in which every person is cordially summoned to develop intellectually, socially, physically, psychologically, and spiritually” (Purkey, 1999, p.2).

Building intentional communities in teacher-education programs will require considering the elimination of on-line courses since, according to Greenleaf, “the process requires community, a face to face group in which the liability of each for the other and all for one is unlimited” (Greenleaf, 1970 as cited in Herman and Marlowe 2005, p. 177). It is almost beyond imagination that a meeting of the faculty community in a program with a spirit-focused, servant-leader conceptual framework would be a, “place where conflict can be resolved without physical or emotional bloodshed and with wisdom as well as grace. A community is a group that can fight gracefully”(Peck, as cited in Frank, 2004, p. 2). Although perhaps beyond imagination, a spiritually focused environment must be the goal. It is not possible to teach what we don’t know (Howard, 1999).

CDF Freedom School provides this sort of environment for the teachers and children in it. It is interpreted by the servant-leader interns in this study as a transformational experience and one that helped them learn to teach in ways their formal teacher education programs did not. The individual and collective voices of these servant-leader interns may now be added to the research literature, and I will trust that they are allowed to, “become prophets who orient the educational process toward a vision of ultimate meaning and infuse education with the sacred” (Purpel, as cited in Slattery, 1995, p.73).



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